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Monday, 20 January 2014, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Judeh	(Jordan)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Estreme
	Australia	Mr. Quinlan
	Chad	Mr. Cherif
	Chile	Mr. Errázuriz
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	France	Mr. Araud
	Lithuania	Ms. Murmokaitė
	Luxembourg	Mr. Asselborn
	Nigeria	Mrs. Ogwu
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Cho Tae-yul
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Rwanda	Mr. Nibishaka
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Ms. Power

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish to warmly welcome the Secretary-General and the ministers and other representatives present at today's meeting. Their participation is an affirmation of the importance of the subject matter under discussion.

In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Brazil, Cuba, Djibouti, Egypt, Guatemala, Iceland, India, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Israel, Japan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Morocco, Namibia, Norway, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Turkey to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and previous practice in this regard.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Thomas Mayr-Harting, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Abdou Salam Diallo, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and previous practice in this regard.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon.

The Secretary-General: I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this important meeting on the situation in the Middle East.

Before I start, let me say just a few words on the situation regarding the talks on Syria. Participants will be aware of the latest developments concerning the Geneva conference on Syria. Intensive and urgent discussions are under way, and I will have more to say about the situation later in the day. For the moment, let me just appeal again to all involved to keep the needs of the Syrian people foremost in mind.

I have just returned from the region and my fifth visit to Iraq. The country is again facing serious threats to its stability. I discussed my concerns with many Iraqi leaders and urged all sides to remain committed to political dialogue and to uphold respect for the rule of law and human rights. I was reassured by their pledge to hold parliamentary elections as scheduled on 30 April. Today, I reiterate my message to the Iraqi political leaders to fulfil their responsibilities to ensure inclusive dialogue, social cohesion and concrete political progress.

I also visited Kuwait. I am extremely grateful to the many countries that pledged generous funding at the Second International Humanitarian Pledging Conference on Syria. In addition, I had a meeting with the emir of Kuwait, and I am encouraged by the improving bilateral relations between his country and Iraq. We also discussed the implementation of resolution 2107 (2013).

Turning to Lebanon, I commend President Sleiman's leadership in upholding the country's disassociation policy. That is vital to prevent the Syrian crisis from exacerbating tensions in Lebanon, as we have seen with the recent acts of terrorism and bombings. Nine years after the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, last week's opening of the trial of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon is a reminder of the fight to end impunity in Lebanon.

Violations of Lebanon's border with Syria continue, including a worrying escalation of rocket firing and airstrikes into Lebanon's Bekaa region. Refugees continue to cross into Lebanon in large numbers, now totalling over 860,000 — a sixfold increase over last year.

The situation in the area of operation of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon remains relatively

stable thanks to the cooperation of the Lebanese and Israeli authorities to contain recent incidents. All must build on the stability that has prevailed along the Blue Line under resolution 1701 (2006).

The Security Council and the International Support Group for Lebanon have called for generous support for the humanitarian response and stabilization efforts, as well as for the Lebanese Armed Forces. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has pledged $3 billion in assistance to the Lebanese army.

I welcome the momentum to form a Government, and encourage all parties to ensure that presidential elections are held on time. The people of Lebanon look to their leaders to work together to steer their country through this difficult time.

The year 2014 will be decisive in helping Israelis and Palestinians draw back from a perilous and unsustainable status quo. United States Secretary of State Kerry has worked diligently to lay out a framework on all core issues to address Israeli and Palestinian aspirations in a fair and balanced manner and to allow for continued negotiations towards a final status agreement. I also pay special tribute to Jordan for its essential role.

Israeli and Palestinian leaders will be required to make bold decisions and painful compromises for peace. They must prepare their peoples for these necessary steps. The failure of political progress could fuel a downward spiral on the ground. I am alarmed by recurrent violence and incitement on all sides, as well as by continued settlement activity, which is illegal under international law. Building settlements is not consistent with building a long-lasting peace agreement. Both parties must act responsibly and with restraint. Gaza also remains a cause for concern. Ultimately, a sustainable two-State solution will require Palestinians to overcome their divisions.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) will begin 2014 with an expected end-of-year shortfall of $67 million under its regular budget. I encourage all Member States to explore ways to strengthen their cooperation with UNRWA and provide additional funding, in particular to its regular budget.

I hope that the parties will reach a framework understanding. It must be fair and consistent with principles on all core issues outlined in Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles — including land for peace — the road map and the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. Palestinians must be able to realize their legitimate aspirations to statehood, self-determination, dignity and freedom, including an end to the occupation that began in 1967, with a just solution to the plight of refugees and a resolution of the status of Jerusalem. Israelis must be able to live in peace and security within recognized borders, paving the way for their increasing integration in a stable and secure region.

The realization of the Arab Peace Initiative will yield socioeconomic, trade, and security benefits for all the peoples of the Middle East. For Palestinians, a comprehensive peace settlement holds the promise of becoming a fully recognized Member State of equal standing. There is no substitute for negotiations to achieve this end. Only then can the United Nations relationship with Palestine be truly transformed so as to fully implement and complete the Palestinian statebuilding agenda.

For Israel, too, only a negotiated solution will bring security and recognition in the region and beyond. Israel would be in a position to reap the full benefits of all forms of cooperation within the United Nations system. The United Nations and its Members would, in turn, greatly benefit from what Israel has to offer. I do not underestimate the difficulties, but the risks of inaction or surrender are far greater. We face possibly the last attempt to salvage the two-State solution. Quite simply, this is too important to fail.

My message to President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu is clear. If they are prepared to take the bold decisions required, I will push ahead on the positive agenda of peace dividends for both sides and ensure that the United Nations works towards realizing the legitimate aspirations of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples within the framework of a comprehensive regional settlement. We must make the most of the prospect that Secretary Kerry has unlocked in order to see the creation of two States living side by side in peace and security that their peoples so desperately desire and deserve.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the Secretary-General for his statement. I appreciate his commitment and diplomatic activities. In the light of ongoing events, I understand that he will now have to leave the Chamber. I therefore wish him every success in his good offices today.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): I thank Mr. Nasser Judeh, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Jordan, for presiding over this meeting, and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing. I reaffirm the State of Palestine's gratitude for the principled efforts they have respectively and consistently exerted for peace and a just solution to the question of Palestine.

It is with immense pride that we see Jordan assume the presidency of the Security Council, and we convey our congratulations and wishes for success during its tenure. Likewise, we extend sincerest congratulations to the other new non-permanent members — Chad, Chile, Lithuania and Nigeria — confident in their adherence to the Charter and abilities to fulfil the serious responsibilities of this organ, including vis-à-vis the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which is the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the goal of a just, comprehensive solution, which is a matter central to international peace and security.

On this occasion, we also express congratulations to the outgoing members of the Council — Azerbaijan, Guatemala, Morocco, Pakistan and Togo — on the completion of their tenure, and reaffirm our appreciation for the principled positions they have taken regarding Palestine during the Council's deliberations over the past two years. I also welcome the ministers who are among us today to participate in this deliberation.

Today, 20 January, is being observed in the United States in commemoration of the life of the great civil rights leader, Martin Luther King, Jr. Mr. King's wisdom inspired and transformed a generation, changed the course of history, and continues to inspire today. We recall today his declaration that

> "[i]njustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly".

This principle lies at the heart of the United Nations aim to promote peace, security, human rights, development and dignity for all peoples. It is a principle acutely applicable to the injustice that continues to be borne by the Palestinian people — an injustice that has harmed our people, our region and global aspirations to peace, security and friendly relations among nations.

This is why the Palestine question has remained on the United Nations agenda for nearly seven decades. That is why the General Assembly has repeatedly affirmed the permanent responsibility of the United Nations until the question is justly resolved. That is also why the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is annually observed on 29 November. And it is why the Assembly rightly proclaimed 2014 as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

The grave impact of this conflict — and, conversely, the multitude of benefits that a peaceful solution would have for the Palestinian and Israeli peoples, the Middle East and the international community as a whole — are facts widely recognized. That was recently echoed by United States Secretary of State John Kerry, who continues to expend tireless efforts, along with the Arab Ministerial Follow-up Committee, the Quartet members — the European Union, the Russian Federation and the United Nations — and many countries from all over the globe in support of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and a peaceful settlement. Secretary Kerry has stated that

> "[t]he stakes here are much bigger than just Israel and Palestine. This is a conflict that is felt around the world. It is a conflict that has implications with every leader I have met anywhere in the world as Secretary of State or a Senator.
>
> "And President Obama is determined that the United States of America and his Administration will do everything in our power to exhaust the possibilities of finding that peace."

We recognize and commend that serious engagement by the international community, and we urge that this support be translated into intensified efforts for the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace during this year. As negotiations are ongoing between Palestine and Israel, the international community and the Council have clear responsibilities and cannot remain on the sidelines. For decades, time, energy and resources have been heavily invested towards the realization of a two-State solution based on the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map. Now is the time to follow-through on that investment with political will and courage.

The long-standing consensus on the parameters of the solution must be reaffirmed, not set

aside — completely ending the Israeli occupation that began in 1967; achieving the independence of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace and security based on the pre-1967 borders; and ensuring a just solution to the Palestine refugee problem based on the relevant resolutions, including General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

The Security Council has a duty to ensure respect for its resolutions, which form the backbone of a fair and sustainable solution. The welcomed international pledges to support and ensure the implementation of a future peace agreement are surely based on the premise that this will be a lasting peace, not one that does not survive as more than ink on paper. That requires respect for the principles of a just solution of all core issues — refugees, Jerusalem, borders, settlements, security, water and prisoners. It is vital that the international community stand by those principles and persuade Israel, the occupying Power, to respect them. That is what will facilitate a permanent agreement and guarantee its viability. And, in the immediate present, that is what will foster an environment conducive to credible negotiations, real progress and the ultimate achievement of our collective goals.

On our part, the Palestinian Government and people are committed to peace and justice and are exhausting all efforts, conducting ourselves on the basis of international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions, including those of the Council, the well-known parameters of the peace process and the agreements reached from 1993 onwards. We have responsibly participated in all stages, rounds and initiatives of the peace process for more than 20 years, including the current negotiations. And we are doing so on the basis of historic compromise and great sacrifice.

Yet the challenges we face on the ground are formidable. Mistrust, cynicism and despair are rising among the Palestinian people, as they continue to witness and endure illegal Israeli practices, which, far from bringing an end to the occupation, are further entrenching it, deforming the two-State solution, impeding socioeconomic development, inflicting vast human suffering and diminishing the hopes that the current peace process will lead to the realization of their freedom and rights.

Since the resumption of negotiations, Israel has announced plans to construct more than 7,600 settlement units, along with the construction under way on thousands more units throughout the occupied State of Palestine, including in and around East Jerusalem. Israel is also continuing the construction of its wall, destroying the contiguity of our land with such illegal colonization measures. Israel is almost daily continuing military raids in Palestinian areas, perpetuating the violent, destructive face of the occupation. Palestinian civilians continue to be killed and injured by the occupying forces. Settler terrorism is rampant. Provocations against Christian and Muslim holy sites, including at Al-Haram Al-Sharif and Al-Aqsa Mosque, in occupied East Jerusalem, persist, inflaming religious sentiments and high tensions.

Moreover, despite the welcomed release of long-term Palestinian prisoners, during 2013 alone at least 4,553 Palestinians, including children, were arrested or detained, adding to the ranks of the more than 5,000 Palestinians currently in Israeli jails. Also, Israel demolished at least 200 Palestinian homes in the past year, forcibly displacing hundreds of people. And the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip continues to deepen the isolation, poverty and humanitarian hardships of our people, particularly our vulnerable refugees, whose subsistence has been almost totally reliant on the support of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

None of that engenders confidence in, or popular backing for, the negotiations. On the contrary, the continuation of Israel's illegal actions and provocative declarations further destabilize the situation and poison the atmosphere, obstructing progress and preventing peace from taking root on the ground and in the hearts and minds of our peoples.

Of course, making peace requires negotiations. But making peace also requires respect for international law and requires a change in mentality, behavior and discourse, consistent with the goals of the peace process and essential for preparing the public for new realities. The negotiations cannot be an objective in themselves or be used as cover to perpetuate the status quo.

There must be an immediate halt to Israel's settlement activities and its attempts to assert control over more territory, whether in Jerusalem, the Jordan Valley or elsewhere, as well as a halt to the arrest of Palestinian civilians, the demolition of homes and the forced displacement of Palestinian families, and all policies of collective punishment against our people,

including in Gaza. That is imperative for creating trust and an appropriate environment for negotiating an end to the conflict, whereby the independent, sovereign and contiguous State of Palestine and the State of Israel can coexist in peace and security and just solutions can be reached on all outstanding core issues.

A lasting solution must be founded on respect for international law and human rights. Peace and security cannot take root in the absence of those elements, as justice and rights are essential for peace to prevail anywhere. Therefore, in reaffirming Palestine's commitment to a peace based on two States, we reaffirm also our commitment to redressing the injustice borne by our people and fulfilling their national aspirations and rights, including the right to return and the right to self-determination.

The Palestinian leadership is acutely aware of this moment's significance and, despite the Israeli obstructions, is negotiating in good faith. If the opportunity for peace before us is lost, it will not be for a lack of effort by Palestine or by the international community, including the Arab States, whose historic Peace Initiative stands and is backed by intensive efforts, including the support of the 57 member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Should Israel choose to persist with colonization, annexation and oppression rather than choosing the path of peace, the response by the international community, including the Council, must be firm and based on the law and the global consensus on the conflict. The message to Israel must be clear: illegal actions entail consequences, and Israel will be held responsible should its actions lead to the collapse of peace efforts and the two-State solution.

Once again, before concluding, I must convey our grave concerns about the tragic situation of Palestinian refugees in Syria. As the conflict rages, our refugees, like other civilians in the country, continue to suffer death, injury, destruction and displacement, even including the starvation to death of children, women and men. The plight of thousands of Palestinian refugees trapped in the Yarmouk camp is shocking and inhumane. It is a humanitarian catastrophe. We urgently appeal for humanitarian access to the camp and to all civilians suffering in the conflict, in line with international law.

This crisis reconfirms the extreme vulnerability of the Palestinian refugees and the need for a just solution to their plight in the context of any peace agreement and of regional peace. We commend the efforts of UNRWA and other humanitarian organizations that are providing emergency aid to the Palestinian refugees in Syria and to those who have fled to Lebanon, Jordan and other countries. As the Geneva Conference approaches, we appeal for the exertion of maximum efforts to ensure the protection of all civilians in Syria, including the Palestinian refugees, and to find a political solution to end this horrific conflict.

I thank you, Mr. President, and the Secretary-General and the members of the Council, including the Ministers of Luxembourg and the Republic of Korea, for participating in the meeting and for their attention to these important matters.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Prosor (Israel): Before I begin, I want to express Israel's condolences on the death of United Nations personnel in Friday's terrorist attack in Kabul. There is no excuse for targeting civilians and United Nations workers.

Allow me to take this opportunity to congratulate Jordan on its election to the Security Council. We thank the Secretary-General, Foreign Minister Judeh, Mr. Jean Asselborn and Vice-Minister Cho Tae-yul for being here today. We also congratulate the new non-permanent members — Chad, Chile, Lithuania and Nigeria — on joining the Council. As ambassadors, they are privileged to represent their countries in the Chamber, and I wish them luck.

The Middle East is known as the cradle of civilization — the birth place of history's greatest empires and three world religions. The region was once admired for its inspiring art, striking architecture and significant innovations. Today, the world looks at the Middle East and sees a region shaken by violence. From the Arabian Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, not a day goes by when we do not read about brutality and bloodshed, or new threats looming on the horizon. Amid that sea of hostility, Israel is an island of stability and democracy. It is a nation in which the majority governs, but the minority enjoys equal rights, a nation that embraces diversity and welcomes diverse opinions, a nation that leads the world in human rights and encourages women to be leaders.

Israel is proud of its democracy and yearns for peace with its neighbours and security on its borders.

The people of Israel are still mourning the loss of their legendary statesman and soldier, Ariel Sharon. He was a fearless leader who knew the heavy price of war and was willing to take bold steps for peace. The State of Israel is still willing to take courageous steps for peace and is committed to serious and meaningful negotiations with the Palestinians. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the United States, in particular Secretary Kerry for his tireless devotion to promoting peace in our region.

Twenty years ago, I recall watching King Hussein and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin meet in the Arava Desert to sign the historic peace treaty between our two countries. At the signing, King Hussein said,

> "This is a peace with commitment. This is our gift to our peoples and the generations to come."

Fifteen years after his death, King Hussein's legacy of peace lives on. Israelis from across the political and religious spectrum still admire King Hussein's towering morality and his profound belief in the sanctity of life and the dignity of every human being. I and most Israelis will never forget the sight of King Hussein consoling the Israeli families whose children had been killed in a terrorist attack. After learning that a Jordanian soldier had murdered seven Israeli schoolgirls, King Hussein travelled to Israel to visit the homes of the bereaved families. One by one, he sat with the grieving parents, held their hands, offered words of condolence and hugged and kissed them. King Hussein told them,

> "I feel that if there is anything left in life, it will be to ensure that all the children enjoy the kind of peace and security that we never had in our times."

That is the legacy that his son, King Abdullah, proudly continues today.

Contrast that picture with a picture from just a few weeks ago. In December, Israel once again made the heartbreaking decision to release convicted Palestinian terrorists in an effort to advance the peace process. The released terrorists were given a heroes' welcome by the Palestinians and embraced by President Abbas. Murderers were met with fireworks and festivities and showered with candies and congratulations. The Palestinian Authority (PA) is rewarding terrorists with tens of thousands of dollars. The motto of the PA's pension plan seems to be "the more you slay, the more we pay." Is that coexistence? Is that tolerance? Is that mutual respect? Grieving Israelis watched as Palestinians celebrated men like Abu Harbish, who threw a firebomb at a bus, murdering 26-year-old Rachel Weiss and her three young children. To everyone in the Chamber I ask, How would you feel if you had to watch your family's murderers being celebrated? Would you call into question the so-called peaceful intentions of your neighbours? President Abbas could learn a great deal from King Hussein of Jordan about demonstrating his commitment to making peace.

Since peace talks began in July, hundreds of examples of Palestinian incitement against Israelis and Jews have occurred. From cradles to kindergartens and from schools to soccer stadiums, Palestinian children are besieged by messages of hate. They are born in hospitals named after violent Palestinian groups, attend schools named after terrorists and are taught from textbooks that equate Zionism with racism. In their free time, Palestinian children play on sports teams named after murderers and watch television programmes that teach that Jews are "our enemies and should be killed."

Rather than condemning that incitement, the Palestinian Authority is amplifying the messages of intolerance. President Abbas' Fatah party regularly displays maps that erase Israel. In one map, for example, the Palestinian flag flies over the entire geographic area of the State of Israel. This map extends from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River and is entitled "Palestine". In a speech on Christmas day, President Abbas declared that Jesus was a "Palestinian messenger" and suggested that Israel was to blame for the exodus of Christians from the Holy Land. That is a blatant attempt to rewrite history and erase any connection between the Jewish people and the land of Israel. Today we are witnessing a mass exodus of Christians from the Palestinian territories and the Arab world because of the constant persecution and discrimination that they face by the Arab States. Abbas's made-up maps and mythical accounts could join the fables of the book *The Thousand and One Nights*.

We have already lost an entire generation to incitement. How many more children will grow up being taught hatred instead of peace, violence instead of tolerance, and martyrdom instead of mutual understanding? The international community must finally confront Palestinian leaders and publically demand an end to incitement.

The glorification of terrorists, combined with unrelenting messages of hatred, are having deadly

consequences. In 2013, there were 1,500 attacks against Israelis, 700 of which occurred after peace negotiations had begun in July. In recent months there has been a sharp increase in terrorist attacks, including the murder of five Israelis. Just last month, a Palestinian sniper murdered 20-year-old Saleh Abu Latif, an Israeli Bedouin civilian. Two days later, a bomb exploded on a civilian bus in a suburb just outside Tel Aviv. Had it not been for the quick thinking of the bus driver and an alert passenger, dozens of people would have been killed. A successful attack could have had disastrous consequences for the peace talks.

In the face of the violence and bloodshed, we have yet to hear President Abbas and the Palestinian Authority utter a single word denouncing those attacks. They even remained silent when it was revealed that one of the bus bombers was, surprisingly, a member of the Palestinian police force. While most police forces have officers that uproot terrorism, that police officer was busy planting bombs.

The Palestinian leadership has yet to learn that real peace requires real commitment. You cannot condemn terrorism to international media and congratulate terrorists on Palestinian media. You cannot victimize others and then insist that you are the victim. And you cannot use this forum to spread destructive messages and then expect constructive results.

How many times have we heard that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the major conflict in the Middle East, and that if we solve that conflict we will solve all of the conflicts in the Middle East? Some in this Chamber have even repeated that fiction. Really? The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the major conflict in the Middle East? Wow. People who say that need an eye doctor to help them to see clearly — beginning, maybe, with the ophthalmologist from Damascus, Bashar al-Assad, who is butchering his people every day. I am sure that is really connected to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Shiites fighting Sunnis fighting Alawites; extremist groups battling one another in Libya, Yemen and Tunisia; Al-Qaida forces overrunning major cities in Iraq — all of that is, of course, caused by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. That is a revelation. The truth is that Israel is an island of stability in a sea of tyranny.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., whose legacy is being celebrated today, once described Israel as

> "one of the great outposts of democracy in the world and a marvellous example of what can be done — how desert land can be transformed into an oasis of brotherhood and democracy. Peace for Israel means security, and that security must be a reality".

I think it should be obvious that the violence and instability afflicting the Middle East have nothing to do with Israel. We must solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on its own merits because it is important for us. Solving the conflict is not a prescription for curing the epidemic of violence plaguing the Middle East. Despite what is constantly heard, the core of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has never been about borders or settlements. The major obstacle to peace remains the refusal of the Palestinian leaders to accept the Jewish State in any border. We will never hear President Abbas or any Palestinian leader utter the phrase "two States for two peoples".

Let me understand that. The Palestinians call for an independent Palestinian State, but want millions of their people to flood the Jewish State. It will never happen. It is a complete non-starter. Many in this Chamber are very vocal in telling Israel what to do, but begin to stutter, mumble and fall silent when it comes to telling the Palestinians what they must do. Each and every one present here must tell the Palestinians that there will never be peace as long as they refuse to recognize Israel as the nation State of the Jewish people and insist on a so-called right of return.

Despite what many believe, Israel dedicates a great deal of its energy and resources to assisting the Palestinian people. Today, more than 100,000 Palestinians earn their living in Israel and their income constitutes more than 10 per cent of the Palestinian gross domestic product. Israel helps generate solutions to energize the Palestinian economy. We transfer millions of dollars in electricity, water and natural gas to power Palestinian homes, schools and hospitals. When a giant storm struck last month, Israel delivered humanitarian aid and water pumps and facilitated the passage of fuel and cooking gas to Palestinians in need.

Yet for every truckload in the name of coexistence, we seem to be feeding a Palestinian opposition that challenges our very existence. It is time for Palestinians leaders to lead; it is time for them to set a course towards coexistence; and it is time for them to build the Palestinian people up, rather than to tear Israel down.

The Middle East is plagued by a reign of tyrants and a drought in leadership. Millions of people have taken

to the streets demanding better lives, better economies and greater opportunities. The first peaceful protests in the region were in the streets of Tehran, where the Government brutalizes it citizens and throws innocent people into jail. Many in the international community believed that the new Iranian President would set a new precedent. It has been almost six months since President Rouhani took office, and Iran is still persecuting minorities, imprisoning journalists and targeting political adversaries. The Iranian Government has executed more of its citizens, per capita, than any other Government. Last year alone, the regime executed almost 600 people, including 367 since President Rouhani took office in August.

Iran does not confine its violence and extremism to its own borders. From Buenos Aires to Burgas, Iran is the world's primary sponsor of terror. Just this month, Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif paid tribute, on behalf of the Islamic Republic, at the grave of one of Hizbullah's most notorious murderers. Rather than cleaning house, the new President believes that he can sweep Iran's atrocities under the Persian rug by introducing United Nations resolutions that condemn violence and extremism. Iran's so-called WAVE resolution, entitled "A world against violence and violent extremism" (resolution 68/127), may have made a splash at the United Nations, but messages of intolerance and violence continue to trickle down from the top.

Behind Iran's smiling façade, President Rouhani and Ayatollah Khamenei continue to preach hatred and provoke hostility. Ayatollah Khamenei recently appeared on State television and delegitimized Israel, using disgusting profanity that does not bear repeating. The ink is barely dry on the interim nuclear agreement and Iran is already showing its true colours. It is a regime that crosses red lines, produces yellow cake and beats its citizens black and blue. Meanwhile, some in the international community are willing to serve Iran its yellow cake on a silver platter. Permitting Iran to keep its enrichment capabilities today means that Iran will retain its ability to break out and build a nuclear bomb tomorrow.

Violence is encoded in the Iranian regime's DNA. It does not take a crime-scene investigator to see Iran's fingerprints on the violence erupting in parts of the Middle East.

In the Gaza Strip, Iran backs the Hamas terrorist organization, which uses Palestinian schools, hospitals and mosques to launch rockets at Israeli citizens. We are barely three weeks into the new year, and Hamas has already launched 17 rockets at Israel, attacks that have closed schools and kept tens of thousands of children in southern Israel at home.

The international community has yet to find the time to utter even a single word of condemnation of those attacks, attacks that could derail the peace process. It has also yet to condemn Hamas for deliberately exploiting children. Schools in Gaza have become the training ground for the next generation of terrorists. Last week, Hamas graduated 13,000 students from paramilitary camps geared at training children to fight Israel.

In Lebanon, Iran has helped Hizbullah hijack the Lebanese State and transform it into an outpost for terror. For years, Hizbullah insisted that it needed a private army to defend Lebanon against, of course, Israel. Today, that army has sent 2,000 fighters to butcher the Syrian people and shoot rockets into Israel.

Hizbullah has positioned 60,000 missiles and rockets in the heart of southern Lebanon's civilian population. General Hajizadeh, a senior commander of the Aero-Space Forces of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, recently boasted that Hizbullah had improved its missile capabilities and could now hit and destroy any target in Israel.

Hizbullah intentionally hides those missiles in the basements of homes, in the playgrounds of schools and in the back rooms of hospitals. In doing so, Hizbullah is committing a double war crime: first, by using Lebanese civilians as human shields and, secondly, by targeting Israeli citizens.

The Government of Lebanon cannot continue to ignore what is happening in southern Lebanon, and it can no longer ignore its international obligations under resolution 1701 (2006). Throughout December, armed terrorists fired shots across the Blue Line into northern Israel. In one incident, a member of the Lebanese Armed Forces shot Israeli soldier Shlomi Cohen in a ruthless and unprovoked attack.

It is time for the Council to hold accountable all those who arm, train and harbour terrorists. It is time to speak out against those who callously disregard human life. As we have seen in Syria, the failure to do so has disastrous consequences.

The war in Syria is approaching its fourth year, and the death toll continues to climb. The Syrian

Government has resorted to new depths of brutality by dropping barrel bombs packed with explosives, nails and other shrapnel on markets and hospitals. In just a few days, more than 700 people have been killed and over 3,000 injured.

The State of Israel and the Jewish people are deeply troubled by the suffering of the Syrian people and are reaching out to help them. While some in the region are aiding the murderous Al-Assad regime, Israel is providing medical aid.

Sunnis, Alawites and Shiites are running to Israel, the so-called enemy, because they know that Israel will treat anyone without prejudice and regardless of ethnicity, religion or gender. We will continue to lend humanitarian assistance to the victims with open arms and an open heart.

Today, the Middle East stands at a critical juncture. There are two roads before us. The first is the future offered by Iran and Syria, a future of more extremism and greater violence. The second is the road towards equality, reform and stability.

Study after study has shown that there is a clear connection between advancing peace and advancing equal rights. When a woman receives an education, her children are healthier and more likely to get an education. When a woman generates her own income, she reinvests 90 per cent in her family and community. But women can help drive a nation's economy only if they are allowed onto the driver's seat.

As we begin the new year, the international community must call upon Arab leaders to choose the path of progress and abandon the road of repression. Tell them that tyranny will fail, tell them that peace is built on tolerance, and tell them that every man and every woman is entitled to equal rights and equal opportunities.

As Winston Churchill said, "All the great things are simple, and many can be expressed in a single word: freedom ... honour ... hope". The international community must stand on the side of human rights and human dignity. We must speak up and speak out so that the people of the Middle East can finally enjoy freedom, honour and hope.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I will now make a statement in my capacity as Minister for Foreign and Expatriate Affairs of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

I am honoured to preside over today's meeting of the Security Council on the item "The situation in Middle East, including the Palestinian question".

First, I would like to take the opportunity to express the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan's appreciation for the States Members of the United Nations for the confidence they have shown my country by electing it, almost unanimously, as a non-permanent member of the Security Council for the 2014-2015 term. We assure the Council that, God willing, we will prove that we are worthy of that confidence, by working with a spirit of cooperation and harmony with other members of the Security Council, entrusted with the primary responsibility of maintaining international peace and security on behalf of the international community.

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, under the leadership of His Majesty King Abdullah II Bin Al Hussein, has a singular record of accomplishment, for which the entire international community has expressed appreciation. It is a record of relentless and fruitful efforts to promote the purposes and principles of the United Nations: achieving global harmony, peace, justice, security and stability. Jordan has also made remarkable contributions, distinguished by both quality and quantity, to United Nations peacekeeping operations in many regions of the world. I can assure the Council today that we will continue to honour that outstanding track record and will work diligently, with a positive spirit, to build on those achievements.

Unfortunately, the Middle East region continues to be gripped by chronic tensions with repercussions and ramifications that threaten international peace and security. That painful continuing reality has imposed on the Council agenda the tradition of regularly convening a special meeting on the Middle East, because the situation in the region is a constant source of concern owing to its direct impact on world peace.

We have no doubt that the continued absence of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace between the Arabs and Israel is the source of most tensions in the Middle East. Hence the achievement of a just and comprehensive peace would give rise to dynamics that would lead to the elimination of other tensions in the region. The key to a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace lies in the implementation of the two-State solution, with an independent and fully sovereign Palestinian State established within the 1967 lines, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living in peace and security

and within secure borders with all countries in the region, including Israel. Such a solution should be in line with the relevant terms of reference adopted in this regard, including the numerous resolutions adopted by the Council, such as resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), in addition to the Arab Peace Initiative, whose importance has been repeatedly acknowledged by the Council.

Based on that conviction, we support the ongoing, much-appreciated efforts led by the United States and undertaken personally by its Secretary of State, Mr. John Kerry, aimed at reaching a Palestinian-Israeli agreement that adopts the two-State solution and addresses all core issues, namely, refugees, Jerusalem, security, borders, water and settlements, in accordance with the aforementioned international terms of reference and resolutions of international legitimacy. We also deeply appreciate the efforts being made by Secretary Kerry to ensure that an agreement is reached by the bodies directly concerned and not by proxy. We have consistently stressed this issue.

In that context, I deem it imperative to stress that we in Jordan believe that the implementation of the two-State solution and the establishment of an independent and fully sovereign Palestinian State within the June 1967 lines, with East Jerusalem as its capital, constitute a higher interest for Jordan. In fact, all of the core issues directly affect higher, factual Jordanian interests. We are the world's largest host of Palestinian refugees, and most of the refugees on our territory are Jordanian citizens in addition to their status as refugees. The protection and restoration of their legitimate rights, as recognized by the international terms of reference pertaining to the peace process, lies at the heart of our responsibilities.

As a host country, we, in turn, have rights owing to the burdens we have shouldered. Regarding East Jerusalem, His Majesty King Abdullah II is ensuring the maintenance and protection of Christian and Islamic holy sites there, as part of the historical Hashemite custodianship of East Jerusalem. We will continue to play that role and to address all Israeli violations, which continue in defiance of several resolutions issued by the Security Council that stipulate that all Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem are null and void and should be halted immediately, and that the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem must end. Moreover, the world rejects Israel's settlement activity, which is illegal and continues even as we speak. In addition, the issues of security, borders and water directly affect the security of Jordan and its interests.

Accordingly — and although we are not a party to the negotiating process yet are a main party in the context of the process as a whole — let me stress that all agreements on the core issues should take into full account and, indeed, meet Jordan's vital and higher interests. Our unyielding commitment to achieving peace is based on our firm conviction that ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would lead to an end to the broader Arab-Israeli conflict, which would, in turn, result in the elimination of many other sources of tension in the region. I cannot fail to point to the tragic humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, particularly in the Gaza Strip, and urge the international community to shoulder its responsibilities in that regard.

The tragic, bloody crisis in Syria continues to rage. This bloodshed must stop immediately. Syria must work to end the crisis there, especially since it has spilled over beyond Syrian borders and now threatens regional and international stability. That threat is associated not only with displacement and an influx of refugees into neighbouring countries, but also with the unrestrained flow of people and weapons into Syria's neighbours. That has become an alarming phenomenon that poses a real security threat to some of those countries, the entire region and even beyond, as international peace and security are at stake. We in Jordan are convinced that a political solution is the only way to end this tragedy.

The upcoming international conference to be held in Montreux, Switzerland, is an opportunity that should not be wasted to put this political solution on the right track through the cessation of hostilities. Such a political solution must meet the aspirations of the Syrian people, for which so much blood has already been shed. The envisioned political transition should immediately lead, through a consensus among all parties, to the establishment of an inclusive executive transitional body representing the entire Syrian spectrum. It should have full authority and act immediately to restore social cohesion in Syria, with complete jurisdiction over the entire territory of the country, in a manner that ensures Syria's territorial integrity and political independence. Such a body should also have full control and sovereignty over Syria's weapons arsenals, pave the way for a pluralistic and democratic political system, and work to restore security and stability in

order to encourage the return of internally displaced persons and refugees in neighbouring countries, with Jordan at the forefront. As the Council is aware, we are currently hosting about 1.3 million Syrian citizens, including nearly 600,000 who have been refugees in Jordan since the outbreak of the crisis three years ago. We are sharing with those brothers and sisters our already limited resources, with the cost of their hosting estimated at $1.7 billion for 2013. We anticipate the cost to reach $2.8 billion in 2014.

We call upon the international community to help us meet the challenge to which we have risen on behalf of humankind. We have previously extended an invitation to the Council to visit the camps so as to get a close look at the situation on the ground. Moreover, I wish to express our gratitude to the State of Kuwait and to the Secretary-General for hosting the International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria. It could be useful for the Security Council to adopt the results of the aforementioned international conference when they are achieved. It would also be useful if it were to adopt a resolution that makes it mandatory for all parties to implement those results. Let me take this opportunity to express our appreciation for all who have made such great efforts to facilitate the holding of this important conference, particularly several States members of the Security Council, namely the initiating countries, the Russian Federation and the United States of America, and others that have played an important role in that regard.

There is no doubt that the unending conflict in the Middle East and the unusual circumstances in some countries of the region are all interlinked because they have been unfolding in a time of war. Such circumstances have produced internal tensions in some countries in our region that in turn have led to practices that have fuelled sectarian, ethnic and religious polarization, opened the door wide to interference by external powers, incited parties against each other and interfered in the internal affairs of some countries in the region, driven by their desire for hegemony and expansion. The result has been a deepened state of polarization that is spilling over into other countries. It poses a real threat to regional and international peace and stability. It is therefore the duty of all to firmly confront violence, extremism and all forms of terrorism, as well as religious, ethnic and sectarian polarization, and to tirelessly work to eliminate the root causes of phenomena that threaten internal and international stability.

Nevertheless, addressing the wave of extremism, sectarian and religious tension and incitement in the region is a challenge to regional security and stability, as its effects can be seen to be spilling over into our neighbouring countries, not just in Syria. It requires us to make concerted efforts to counter such ideas. Building on the Amman Message and the "A Common Word" initiative, and under the guidance of His Majesty King Abdullah II Bin Al Hussein, we in Jordan have embarked on an effort to address those phenomena.

In the context of that effort, an Islamic conference was convened in Amman last summer, at which participants voiced their complete rejection of the use of and incitement to sectarian conflict. It was stressed at the conference that the freedom of opinion and belief and the sanctity of human blood were sacred. The conference rejected the apostatizing approach and the use of such practices in political conflict. The conference was followed by another, entitled "Challenges facing Christian Arabs", at which His Majesty stressed that

> "[w]e believe that the protection of the rights of Christians is a duty rather than a favour. Arab Christians have played a key role in building Arab societies and defending the just causes of our Nation [and that] "[w]e support every effort to preserve the historical Arab Christian identity and safeguard the right to worship freely, based on the principle in both the Christian and Islamic faiths that emphasizes the love of God and of neighbour, as embodied in the 'A Common Word' initiative".

Finally, I thank the Council again and reiterate that Jordan, as the world has always known it to do, will continue to work hard and earnestly for the development of cooperation and cordial relations between the countries of the world and its peoples. It will pursue its approach and mission to enhance international security and peace and counter isolationism, despair and hatred. Jordan will tirelessly work to promote harmony and respect among all nations and peoples, cultures and civilizations. That will bring us together under the umbrella of humanity, which is an ideal that will yield the greatest benefits to all.

I now resume my functions as the President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the members of the Council.

Mr. Asselborn (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to congratulate Jordan on its election to

the Security Council, and on its assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month, at a particularly important juncture for the Middle East. Your presence among us, Mr. President, highlights the significance of this open debate, at the beginning of a crucial week for efforts to end the conflict in Syria, the impact of which represents a very heavy burden for your country and the other neighbouring countries of Syria, above all for Lebanon.

I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing. I also thank the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine and the Permanent Representative of Israel for their statements.

First, I would like to address the Middle East peace process. There is today a historic opportunity to build peace between Israelis and Palestinians. The announcement six months ago of the resumption of negotiations was an important first step. It is now our shared responsibility to support the efforts of the United States and the indefatigable commitment of Secretary of State John Kerry in order to help the parties take the difficult yet indispensable decisions to realize the vision of the long-term interests of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. To succeed, the negotiations process requires a favourable political environment and measures that strengthen mutual trust. Some steps still need to be taken. Unilateral acts that feed the logic of distrust must cease.

The year 2013 ended on a positive note, with Israel's freeing of a third group of 26 Palestinian prisoners. However, we remain deeply worried about the pursuit of the Israeli settlement policy, which is illegal under international law and represents a real threat to peace and goes against the principle of good faith negotiations. Nobody will believe that the efforts to achieve peace can succeed if settlement activities continue, if the Gaza blockade persists, if the separation wall keeps on grabbing Palestinian land, and if the destruction of Palestinian infrastructures intensifies.

We are also highly worried by the continuing rocket attacks launched by certain Palestinian factions from the Gaza strip against Israeli territory. Nothing justifies that blind and unacceptable recourse to violence, which clearly does not serve the Palestinian cause. We must end every kind of provocation and respect the borders of the Palestinian people and the security of the Israeli population; both are closely intertwined.

The American initiative is probably the last chance to end the occupation, implement the two-State solution based on the borders of 1967 and create a sovereign, independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security with Israel, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States. We must take advantage of this opportunity, and Luxembourg will continue to engage with its European Union partners to contribute to the ongoing efforts, in close cooperation with key stakeholders, the Quartet and the countries of the region.

The Secretary-General has just recalled the objective of the second Geneva Conference on Syria, which starts the day after tomorrow in Montreux — the cessation of hostilities, an end to all violence and the beginning of a political settlement on the basis of the full and comprehensive implementation of the 30 June 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex). That must lead to the establishment of a transitional governing body exercising full executive powers and formed on the basis of mutual consent. We welcome the decision taken on 18 January by the Syrian National Coalition to attend the second Geneva Conference. I can only encourage the Syrian National Coalition to maintain the courageous position it has taken. I also call on Iran to commit to playing a constructive role to put an end to the Syrian conflict by explicitly signing onto the implementation of the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 and the establishment of a transitional governing body exercising full executive powers, as called for in the Secretary-General's letter of invitation. The authorities in Damascus must now allow the Syrian people to take their destiny into their own hands, and they must stop rejecting the principles of a political transition, which were agreed in the Geneva communiqué.

The needs and rights of all Syrians must be taken into account — in particular those of the Syrian women, who, together with the children, have borne the brunt of the repression since it started. With others, Luxembourg is working towards the full participation of women in the political transition process in Syria, in accordance with resolutions 1325 (2000) and 2122 (2013). In order for the negotiations process to lead to lasting peace, it is indeed important that, from the beginning, women are empowered to make their voices heard and express their point of view, share their experiences, their concerns and their specific needs.

The humanitarian and security challenges can be resolved only through a negotiated political settlement

of the crisis. Faced with the spiral of violence that threatens the region, however, we cannot wait for the conclusion of a future political process, and we cannot turn a blind eye to the long list of war crimes and crimes against humanity, which bring Syria each day closer to its destruction. Given the bombing of hospitals and schools, the deliberate and indiscriminate attacks against civilians and medical and health-care workers, the targeting of pharmacies, the use of starvation as a weapon of war to pressure the people of Ghouta, the sieges and massacres, and the use of chemical weapons, Scud missiles and barrel bombs, nothing seems to be off-limits any more in Syria and a climate of total impunity prevails. In the face of those horrors, I want to repeat here what we have been saying for a year: the Council must refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

The humanitarian crisis has reached catastrophic proportions. We know this. More than 9 million Syrians, about half the population of the country, are in desperate need of emergency aid, in particular those who are trapped in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. Confronted with that crisis, the world is mobilizing: more than $2.4 billion in assistance was pledged at the second conference held in Kuwait City on 15 January. I personally participated in that conference to announce a new contribution of Luxembourg representing an increase of more than 60 per cent compared to our pledge of 2013.

Unfortunately, the pledged aid will not be able to achieve its aim if there is no progress in terms of humanitarian access on the ground. Without immediate, safe and unhindered access, the survival of half the Syrian population is at stake. The same goes for the Palestinians trapped in Yarmouk. The Syrian people cannot be content with a few localized and fragile ceasefires, or the liberation of a few political prisoners. It cannot be content with concessions made here and there by the authorities in Damascus when it is in their strategic or political interest. The authorities must respect their obligations and they must implement the demands of the Council. Without significant progress in terms of access, the Council will need, in our opinion, to assume its responsibilities and adopt a humanitarian resolution.

I shall conclude my statement by addressing the situation in Lebanon. In the past months, the number of deadly attacks have multiplied. I will mention only the attack in Beirut on 27 December 2013, which cost the life of former Minister Mohamad Chatah, a man of dialogue. That is a very worrying sign of the growing impact of the Syrian conflict on the security and stability of Lebanon. The very clear message sent by the Council in its presidential statement of 10 July 2013 (S/PRST/2013/9) and in the numerous press statements that followed remains more than ever valid today. That message calls on all those who disregard the Baabda Declaration to put an end to their actions, which threaten the model of unity in diversity that is Lebanon.

In that regard, I would like to reiterate our support to Lebanon, its institutions and its policy of dissociation. Finally, I welcome the opening, on 16 January, before the Special Tribunal for Lebanon of the trial in absentia of four members of Hizbullah accused of assassinating former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005. I hope that the trial will mark the beginning of the end of impunity for the crimes committed in Lebanon.

Mr. Cho Tae-yul (Republic of Korea): First of all, I would like to express my deep appreciation to you, Mr. President, for your devoted efforts in organizing today's open debate. Let me also extend my sincere thanks to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his comprehensive briefing.

During the final weeks of 2013 and the beginning of the new year, critical developments have transpired in the Middle East at a steady pace. Some are positive, giving us cause for cautious optimism, while others present uncertainties and concerns. The great Syrian poet Adonis once wrote, "To whom do these distances belong that separated us and that now bind us?" Indeed, disagreements and differences among us are the very origin of the challenges we face. At the same time, such differences also highlight our interconnectedness and push us towards a renewed resolve to address the problems before us.

We welcome the second Geneva Conference on Syria, to be convened later this week. As a participant, the Republic of Korea will play its due part in order to achieve meaningful progress. We would like to commend the efforts made by all parties who made the conference possible.

In nearly three years of fighting, the conflict has resulted in more than 120,000 deaths, 2.3 million refugees and 6.5 million internally displaced persons. Comprehensive and action-oriented peace talks are now an absolute necessity, and an unconditional ceasefire and expanded humanitarian access are urgently needed.

From now on, every second is of infinite value, and we must seize the moment to stop further human suffering. Recently, there has been a brutal campaign waged by the Syrian Government with the use of heavy weapons, such as barrel bombs, in densely populated areas. We condemn such attacks and urge the Syrian Government to halt that indiscriminate killing. Clashes between predominantly foreign Al-Qaida-affiliated groups and local opposition forces are also a matter of deep concern. We are deeply troubled by the reports of massacres, mass graves and forced religious conversions.

On the other side of recent developments, we welcome the continued progress made in the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013). We commend the joint efforts by the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons, even in the face of an incredibly challenging environment. Together with the outcome of the humanitarian aid donor conference held in Kuwait last week, those are good signs that our joint efforts are making progress. I sincerely hope that such efforts will provide the basis for the success of the second Geneva Conference.

Another worrying example of the spillover from the Syrian conflict is the recent attacks against the city of Fallujah in Iraq, which were perpetrated by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. The Republic of Korea is deeply concerned about the increased human losses and the worsening humanitarian situation in that area. We encourage the Iraqi Government to continue its close cooperation with local leaders to fight back the extremist militia. We hope that Iraq will achieve lasting peace and stability through an inclusive political process and reconciliation.

The escalating violence in Lebanon is also of serious concern to many of us in the Chamber. The Republic of Korea strongly condemns the recent spate of terrorist attacks in Beirut and Hermel. The attack on the Iranian Embassy in Beirut, the assassination of the former Minister Mohamad Chatah and the targeted attacks on civilians in south Beirut are all a reflection of the continued spillover from the Syrian conflict into Lebanon. The Korean Government urges all parties in Lebanon to respect the disassociation policy and to refrain from any involvement in the Syrian crisis, in accordance with their commitments as set out in the Baabda Declaration.

The Republic of Korea also extends its support to the United Nations-backed Special Tribunal for Lebanon, which convened last week in The Hague. We hope that the perpetrators of the 2005 terrorist attack that killed former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and 21 others will be brought to justice. We view the Special Tribunal as a historic opportunity to combat impunity in Lebanon.

It is an indisputable fact of life that the prompt and long-overdue settlement of the Middle East peace process constitutes a foundation for peace and stability in the entire Middle East region. In that regard, the Korean Government commends Israel and Palestine for remaining committed to peace negotiations, and notes with appreciation the continued efforts of the United States Government to make progress in the right direction. We believe that working towards an agreed framework that establishes concrete guidelines to deal with the core issues will lead to the much-needed breakthrough in the ongoing peace talks.

At the same time, we sincerely hope that the continued settlement activities and the demolition of Palestinian buildings will come to an end. We condemn the continued rocket attacks on Israel from Gaza, which threaten the fragile peace. It is also important that security in the West Bank improve in order to foster the necessary confidence and enable the negotiations to move forward.

We all know that, in today's ever interconnected world, no single country can enjoy peace and stability in separation from the rest of the world. That is why the international community must work together in dealing with regional conflicts. The Republic of Korea would therefore like to emphasize the importance of sustained efforts to promote peace and stability in the Middle East. In that regard, it is imperative that the Security Council, which bears the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, play its due role, serving to forge a united voice.

The President: I would like to say that, as we mark Martin Luther King Jr. Day today, Dr. King's message of peace, equality, freedom and justice resonates across the globe to this very day.

Ms. Power (United States of America): The Middle East has often been prey to the turbulence of conflicting forces, but rarely have we seen efforts towards peace and the staggering human costs of war so vividly and so simultaneously evident. That contrast is especially

striking in Syria, where diplomatic initiatives have intensified against the backdrop of an ever-more brutal civil war.

The best way to begin to bring that war to an end is through the second Geneva Conference on Syria, scheduled to start in Switzerland on Wednesday. My Government has been working closely with the international community and the Syrian opposition coalition to prepare for that Conference. We welcome the coalition's courageous decision this past weekend to participate in the talks, the purpose of which is to ensure the implementation of the Geneva Action Group communiqué (S/2012/523, annex). That document calls for the establishment, based on mutual consent, of a transitional governing body with full executive authority, including over military and security entities. It is vital that all participants in the opening ministerial meeting and in subsequent talks support that core goal.

As of this morning, however, Iran has yet to demonstrate its willingness to subscribe to the full implementation of the Geneva communiqué, which is a minimum requirement for participation in the peace process.

The Syrian Government's recent and deadly bombing campaign, including the use of Scud missiles and barrel bombs in the Aleppo and Damascus suburbs, provides further demonstration of the Al-Assad regime's cruelty and of the fact that there is no military solution to the conflict. That is why we are so focused on a negotiated political transition of the type to be discussed in Geneva.

The urgency of diplomatic progress is highlighted by the deepening of the humanitarian crisis created by the war and by the Syrian Government's failure to implement the Council's presidential statement of 2 October 2013 (S/PRST/2013/15).

In recent days, the Syrian regime has seemingly agreed to improve humanitarian access to besieged areas, but we have not seen evidence of meaningful implementation on the ground. For months, communities, including Yarmouk, East Ghouta, Daraya, the Old City of Homs and Moadamiya, have been besieged and cut off from food and medical supplies. It is not just the case that food cannot get in; people — starving people, desperate people — cannot get out. On the very rare occasions that evacuations from besieged areas have been organized, the regime has taken inhabitants away to be screened. In many cases, the whereabouts of those individuals are unknown and remain unknown today.

East Ghouta is an egregious example of Syrian obstruction. It is an area where international chemical weapons inspectors were allowed access but where 160,000 civilians remain cut off from humanitarian aid. Pro-Al-Assad snipers regularly target residents attempting to travel through checkpoints. The Government has blockaded fuel supplies, and residents have electricity for only a couple of hours per day. A young child even died of carbon monoxide poisoning because his family had been compelled to burn firewood inside their house to keep warm. Let us be clear: if inspectors can obtain access to East Ghouta, so too should the providers of medicine and food.

Yarmouk provides another tragic example. It has been under constant siege since July 2013. Recent reports of more than a dozen malnutrition-related deaths among children and other Palestinian residents are horrifying and should shock the conscience of all of us. We received reports from the United Nations in recent days that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East was finally able to carry in a small amount of food parcels — 200 parcels, which will feed 1,000 people for one month. There are 18,000 people in Yarmouk who are under siege, lacking food and medicine. It is devastating to imagine how starving people will divide up the food parcels. Humanitarian providers who managed to deliver those food parcels literally had to dodge sniper fire.

Although the regime is primarily responsible for denying humanitarian access, some opposition groups have also been culpable in such communities as Nubal, Zahra and Foua'a. That is unacceptable. The deliberate blocking or withholding of life-giving aid by any party cannot be justified and must stop now before more innocent people die.

The plight of Syrian civilians and refugees is heart-breaking and makes last week's conference in Kuwait all the more important. The United States pledged $380 million in new funds to help tackle the crisis, bringing our total commitment since the fighting began to more than $1.7 billion. We welcome the new pledges from other donor nations, as well as the international community's renewed commitment to assisting the Syrian people and the neighbouring countries that are providing a safe haven for refugees.

In the brief period before the second Geneva Conference, it is critical that we make concrete progress on humanitarian access issues. We must also do everything that we can to halt the violence. To that end, we call urgently on all parties to agree on local ceasefires and to move ahead with prisoner releases.

We commend your country, Jordan, Mr. President, for sheltering some 600,000 refugees, and we recognize the enormous economic and social toll the conflict has taken on your country. Jordan has opened its doors for an emergency situation, and we know that that is draining its domestic resources. The international community has an obligation to ensure that Jordan's generosity does not become an unsustainable burden on its population.

In Lebanon the situation has grown even more perilous, as the Syrian war has exacerbated the security, financial and social pressures faced by the nation's leaders. More than 1,600 Lebanese communities bear the burden of hosting more than 900,000 refugees from Syria. My Government continues to help Lebanon tackle its massive challenges via the recently established International Support Group for Lebanon. We urge other donors also to provide aid that is consistent with International Support Group priorities. A stable and united Lebanon with strong democratic institutions is in the best interests of the Lebanese people and of citizens throughout the Middle East. In that context, we encourage the formation of a new Cabinet to address the country's security, economic and humanitarian challenges and to meet its international obligations.

The Syrian civil war has contributed to rising sectarian violence and political friction inside Lebanon. As has been said, the assassination, on 27 December 2013, of the widely respected former finance minister Mohamad Chatah was an outrage. The 2 January suicide bombing in southern Beirut's Haret Hreik neighbourhood killed 5 people and wounded many more. Meanwhile, sporadic violence has continued for weeks in Tripoli and near the Syrian border.

In that respect, we note Saudi Arabia's commitment, announced last month, to provide generous amounts of additional aid to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). We will continue to partner closely with Lebanon's security services, which have a pivotal role to play in support of Lebanon's security and sovereignty. We condemn the violence, urge all parties to exercise restraint, and commend the LAF for its efforts to stem the violence. The Lebanese Government's policy of disassociation from the Syrian conflict, as enshrined in the Baabda Declaration, must be upheld.

It is equally vital that all relevant Security Council resolutions be implemented, including resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006), which call for the disbandment and disarmament of all militias in Lebanon. The United States strongly condemns the 29 December 2013 rocket attack that was launched from Lebanese territory into Israel.

Finally, we welcome the start of the trial before the Special Tribunal for Lebanon of four persons charged with the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and others who were killed in the bombing. That trial is a positive step towards justice and away from the acceptance of impunity for political violence, and we commend the Lebanese Government and other donor countries for supporting the Tribunal.

Turning to the subject of Middle East peace, the United States is continuing its efforts to assist the Israelis and Palestinians in reaching a final status agreement that recognizes two States for two peoples, living side by side in peace and security. Secretary of State Kerry returned to the region earlier this month in support of a proposed framework that addresses all core issues. As the parties consider the difficult decisions ahead, the United States remains convinced that the benefits of peace for both sides can best be achieved through the kind of process in which we are presently engaged. Accordingly, the United States reiterates its view that all parties should refrain from actions that might undermine the atmosphere required for ongoing negotiations. Steps that diminish trust, such as continued settlement activity, only feed scepticism on both sides.

Further, we are deeply troubled by the escalation of violence leading to civilian casualties. We condemn rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel and the attempt to kill civilians by placing a bomb on a public bus in Tel Aviv. We are also seriously concerned about the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, and urge all parties to cooperate in expanding access for people, goods and humanitarian supplies.

The consistent support of peace efforts by key partners is essential. We particularly welcome the European Union's generous pledge last month to provide unprecedented political and economic support for Israel and the Palestinians in the context of a final status peace

agreement. We are gratified as well by the decision of the League of Arab States, whose representatives met with Secretary Kerry in Paris on 12 January, to reaffirm its commitment to those negotiations.

Finally, on Iraq, I thank the Secretary-General for reporting on his recent visit and would like to commend the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for their efforts to ensure the delivery of aid to the people of Anbar province. The United States strongly condemns the attacks carried out by forces affiliated with Al-Qaida in Anbar and elsewhere in Iraq. Their brazen attempt at destabilization cannot be allowed to succeed. As the Council made clear in its recent statement,

> "no terrorist act can reverse the path towards peace, democracy and reconstruction in Iraq, which is supported by the people and the Government of Iraq and the international community" (*S/PRST/2014/1*).

In that spirit, we are encouraged by the cooperation being shown by Iraq's Government, its national security forces and local tribal leaders in trying to restore stability, resist terrorist aggression and ease the hardships faced by Iraqi civilians.

I, too, note that today is a national holiday in the United States. Martin Luther King Jr. taught the citizens of my country and people everywhere to pursue justice and the resolution of differences by peaceful means. In his words, "returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars". The wisdom in that warning is always and everywhere relevant, but never more so than now in the Middle East, where peace initiatives demand our support amid the anguish of continued conflict.

Mr. Quinlan (Australia): I thank you, Mr. President, for your presence here today. We acknowledge Jordan's efforts to promote a Middle East peace, and we thank Jordan for bearing such a difficult burden in sheltering so many of those who have fled the Syrian conflict. I also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

We all know that 2014 will be a critical year — maybe a decisive year — for the Middle East peace process. The final status negotiations under way offer the best chance for peace in the region, and Australia of course fully supports those negotiations towards a just and lasting two-State solution, with Israelis and Palestinians living side by side in peace and security within internationally recognized borders. We appreciate United States Secretary of State Kerry's perseverance and the effective engagement of all parties in the negotiations. Great courage and statesmanship will be required in equal measure to achieve peace, and we offer our full support to Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas at this critical juncture in the negotiations. For this best chance to succeed, we call on both parties to avoid any provocative actions that would undermine confidence in the talks. Australia itself stands ready to assist in any way it can to support the negotiations.

At the same time, we remain deeply concerned at the growing impact of the Syrian conflict on peace and stability in the region. We welcome the efforts of the Secretary-General and the United Nations to start a process this week that will hopefully lead to a political solution based on the principles agreed at the first Geneva conference in 2012. Australia has accepted the Secretary-General's invitation to participate. The goal of the the second Geneva Conference on Syria must remain the establishment of a transitional governing body with full executive powers, as agreed in the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). We urge the Syrian Government and the Syrian National Coalition to participate constructively, and countries with influence to lend their full support to the process. The Syrian parties should also heed the Secretary-General's insistence that their delegations to the Conference include broad and substantial representation of women.

We are concerned by the increasing presence in Syria of groups with links to Al-Qaida. Those organizations have no place in Syria's future, and existing Council sanctions against them must be implemented by all States.

The recent admission by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights that the situation on the ground in Syria is now so bad that it can no longer update its estimates of the conflict's death toll is a chilling fact. It is obvious that a political process that can bring an end to this conflict is desperately needed. The urgency of the humanitarian crisis was underscored last week by the discussions in Kuwait, where States met to discuss the unprecedented appeal by humanitarian agencies. We welcome the pledges that were made, and urge that they be swiftly honoured and coordinated closely with the United Nations.

We are also pleased to have been able to make our own contribution to the joint mission of the

Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the United Nations and its vital work in removing all chemical weapons from Syria. We must not allow that work to be delayed, and Syria itself must meet its obligations to eliminate all elements of its chemical weapons programme.

Foreign Minister Asselborn has just described the terrible magnitude of the humanitarian crisis. We endorse his comments. It is imperative that humanitarian assistance reach people in need. We again call on the parties to the conflict to adhere immediately to the provisions of the Council's presidential statement S/PRST/2013/15 of October 2013 regarding access for humanitarian workers and supplies. We are especially concerned about the large numbers of civilians still trapped in besieged towns. All parties to the conflict must ensure that humanitarian supplies can get through, including through the development of urgent local ceasefires. Those States with influence with the parties should reinforce this message in accordance with the work plan agreed in the high-level group on humanitarian challenges in Syria convened by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

As we know, the conflict has had a hugely destabilizing impact on Syria's neighbours. One year ago, neighbouring countries were host to over half a million Syrian refugees. Today, the number is almost 2.5 million — more than 10 per cent of Syria's population. The Council must be conscious of the fact that Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq are all shouldering enormous burdens as part of the conflict. That underlines the need for continued efforts by the Council on Syria.

In Lebanon, the destabilizing effects of the conflict are all too apparent, given the recent spate of car bombings, including the assassination of the former Finance Minister and the attack on the Iranian Embassy. We commend the efforts of the Government of Lebanon and the Lebanese Armed Forces to maintain security and urge all parties to adhere to President Sleiman's policy of disassociation from the Syrian conflict. Lebanon's political parties need to work together and form a Government quickly, so that Lebanon's challenges can best be addressed.

In concluding, we condemn the violence perpetrated in western Iraq in recent weeks by the Al-Qaida-linked Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and its associates. We must continue to support the ongoing anti-terrorist efforts of the Iraqi Government, together with tribal leaders, in combating that aggression. Resolving that threat will be important so as to ensure that there is no delay in the 30 April electoral timetable. Timely credible elections will help to facilitate an inclusive political dialogue in Iraq. Such an inclusive dialogue is essential. We encourage Iraq's various community leaders to continue to work together to achieve that and to resolve the country's challenges.

Mr. Estreme (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, allow me to express Argentina's satisfaction at seeing you, Sir, preside over this meeting of the Security Council at such a critical time for the Middle East. I would like to convey to you my country's thanks in particular for being here with us today.

I would like to talk about two issues: the Syrian crisis and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. With regard to Syria, Argentina welcomes the progress made in the recent weeks and days, in particular the meeting of senior officials of the United States, the Russian Federation and the United Nations, which opened the way for the convening of the second Geneva Conference on Syria. As we are all aware, it is a historic opportunity to put an end to the conflict in Syria. The process that will begin there will not be easy. Given the extent of the hostility among the parties and the amount of violence and mutual distrust, reaching agreements will be an extremely difficult task. We appeal to all parties to avoid any action that could undermine the process of the Conference. In that context, we endorse the call by the Secretary-General for a ceasefire, allowing the United Nations to support peace talks between the Syrian Government and the anti-Government forces.

In order for the second Geneva Conference on Syria to be successful, the regional and international actors supporting both parties in the dispute must be fully convinced that only a political solution is possible. As we have said on other occasions, Argentina believes that peace in Syria depends, to a large extent, on what key regional or international actors do or fail to do. All those that have a decisive influence on the parties must play a role in support of the process, without which it will be difficult for the second Geneva Conference on Syria to succeed. We also appeal to all parties to commit to the negotiating process in order to put an end to a conflict that has now lasted for more than 33 months, caused great loss of life and threatens to destroy Syria.

In that context, allow me to say that we are greatly concerned about the activities of the rebel groups

that maintain links with Al-Qaida, not only because of the serious terrorist threat but also owing to their effect on the rest of the region, which could become a serious threat to regional stability and international security. In addition, we reiterate that the continuing supply of weapons to both sides in the dispute has been instrumental to the increasing militarization of the conflict. We insist that the provision of arms to the parties must stop. There is no doubt that the weapons in Syria are being used to commit violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

We welcome the progress made in implementing resolution 2118 (2013) with regard to chemical weapons. We in particular welcome the ongoing progress made in eliminating the chemical weapons programme of the Syrian Arab Republic. That is an indication that the close cooperation between the United Nations and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons continues to be fruitful and that the Syrian Government continues to cooperate with the United Nations Joint Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic and its objectives and upholds its commitment to meet its obligations.

With regard to ending the second phase and for the next phase, the strong commitment and support of the international community, including the Security Council, are required. We reiterate that it is essential, in that regard, that those States with influence on the parties, in particular the opposition groups, use that influence to promote the success of the Mission and, in particular, to call for ensuring the safety and neutrality of the Mission and its staff.

We must also reiterate our concern about the loss of human lives as a result of the Syrian conflict. The vast majority of those lives have been lost owing to the use of conventional weapons by both the Government and the armed opposition. Argentina firmly condemns the deaths of an unacceptable number of civilians.

We are deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation of half of the Syrian people, who are in urgent need of help. In that regard, we welcome the results of the recent donor conference, held in Kuwait. The continuing impediments to access for humanitarian aid make the civilian population even more vulnerable and exacerbate their already distressing living conditions. We call on all parties to allow access to humanitarian aid in accordance with international law and, in particular, international humanitarian law.

Another distressing element of the Syrian conflict is the flow of refugees to neighbouring countries and the serious humanitarian situation that those countries face as a result. I would like express our gratitude to the Government and people of Jordan for their commitment and their efforts to provide assistance and safety to those fleeing the conflict. Argentina is convinced that the war crimes, the crimes against humanity and the serious violations of human rights cannot remain unpunished. We therefore reiterate that the Security Council must consider referring the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

Argentina views with cautious optimism the fact that the Palestinians and Israelis are continuing to participate in the negotiations on the peace process. However, progress is slow and extremely difficult. We believe that, in order to make greater progress, it is necessary to move forward on the basis of the long and broadly agreed principles, without questioning the parameters of the two-State solution enshrined in international law and supported by the vast majority of the international community. Two States on the basis of the 1967 borders, with the agreed land swaps, Jerusalem as the future capital of the two States, the necessary security arrangements and a fair solution to the refugee issue should be the foundation for any negotiation.

Furthermore, although gestures have been made, such as the release of Palestinian prisoners prior to the Oslo Agreement, there continue to be other developments that are completely incompatible with the peace process, exacerbate the lack of trust and do not help towards creating favourable conditions for dialogue. Those include, in particular, the recent announcements of illegal settlements on the West Bank and in East Jerusalem, the approval by the Ministerial Committee for Legislative Affairs of the State of Israel of a bill for the annexation of the Jordan Valley, the marked increase in attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinians and the missile launches from the Gaza Strip and the resulting military responses, as well as the continual rhetoric of confrontation. We call on the parties to renew their commitment to the peace process and to abstain from all action that may undermine efforts to move forward in the pursuit of a lasting peace.

In conclusion, I would like to say that the coming months will be decisive in ending an occupation that has lasted more than half a century and violates international law. It also is morally reprehensible, politically unacceptable and strategically unviable.

Argentina wholeheartedly believes in the importance of the international community's meaningful assistance in the negotiations. The lack of progress or a new failure in that effort might seriously harm the two-State solution, with serious consequences. In that connection, we reiterate our belief that the Security Council must pronounce itself on the situations I have mentioned, take concrete steps to complement the negotiations and show the way towards a two-State solution — for example, by accepting Palestine's request to become a State Member of the United Nations, as a follow up to General Assembly resolution 67/19.

It is for the Council, in compliance with its obligations, to send out clear messages, and not to remain indifferent in the face of actions that undermine regional and international efforts to provide a solution to the conflict.

Ms. Murmokaitė (Lithuania): I would like to thank you, Foreign Minister Judeh, for convening this meeting. I also thank the Secretary-General for his update on the situation in Middle East.

In Syria, the total destruction of the country's economic and social fabric, displacement and starvation, increasing fragmentation, sectarianism and the spread of extremism are the price of the Government's failure, three years ago, to respond to its people's peaceful demands for reforms. The effects of the war in Syria are felt throughout the region, with neighbouring countries struggling to accommodate the refugee flows, and Al-Qaida affiliates and other extremists using the crisis for their ends. The failure to put an end to the extraordinary human suffering and continuous massive violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in Syria is deeply troubling. We note the ongoing efforts, under extremely challenging circumstances, aimed at the removal of chemical weapons from Syria, and take note of the Syrian Government's reassurances that it is fully committed to the process.

At the same time, we stress that further delays in the removal of chemical weapons, including the most dangerous chemical agents, must be avoided. All necessary equipment is in place. It is now up to the Syrian Government to ensure that all chemical materials are delivered to the port for removal. All parties to the conflict have the responsibility to make sure that the task is carried out on time and without incidents. Furthermore, progress on the chemical-weapons track must be accompanied by tangible and sustained progress on the humanitarian track. Let us not forget that civilians in Syria continue to die from the indiscriminate use of heavy weapons, aerial bombing, including incendiary barrel bombs, and mortar shelling. We condemn in the strongest terms the ongoing violations of international humanitarian law and strongly urge all the parties to the conflict, in particular the Syrian authorities, to live up to their legal obligations to protect civilians.

We also urge the warring parties to take all the necessary measures to provide safe and unhindered humanitarian access throughout the country, ensuring the full and immediate implementation of the Security Council presidential statement of 2 October 2013 (S/PRST/2013/15). We note the fact that some supplies to places that have been sealed off for months, including Camp Yarmouk, were allowed through in the past few days. However, as Under-Secretary-General Valerie Amos stressed in her latest report, such exceptions should become the rule. We commend the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and other international humanitarian actors for their efforts, under very difficult circumstances, to provide relief assistance to the suffering population. Lithuania has contributed before, and will continue to do so, in response to the humanitarian needs of the Syrian people.

In a couple of days, the second Geneva Conference on Syria will offer a window of opportunity to end this devastating war. We strongly urge all parties to fully commit to the dialogue and prove that commitment by their actions. The only solution to the conflict is a genuine political transition in Syria, based on the full implementation of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). Syrian women must be part of that solution. Their active participation must be ensured at all stages of negotiation, reconciliation and peacebuilding.

Let me turn briefly to Syria's neighbourhood. In recent weeks, Lebanon has been shaken by a series of terrorist attacks. Rocket fire and cross-border strikes from Syria have caused casualties and are adding to the tensions in the country. We appeal to the Lebanese people to preserve their national unity, and appreciate the policy of disassociation from the Syrian crisis. We welcome the opening of the Hariri assassination trial at the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. It is essential that those who commit acts of terror be held to account. Impunity cannot be allowed to continue.

The recent attacks in Anbar province and elsewhere in Iraq, which claimed multiple lives, remind us of the gravity of threat posed by terrorism. We express our support to the Government of Iraq in countering that threat. We appreciate the efforts of Iraqi security forces, local police and tribal leaders aimed at defeating Al-Qaida affiliates. At the same time, we stress the importance of continued national dialogue and an inclusive political process to ensuring the country's long-term stability and security. We look forward to the holding of free and fair elections in April.

Let me now turn to the Middle East peace process.

Lithuania strongly supports the current United States-backed direct peace negotiations and commends the personal involvement and commitment of Secretary of State John Kerry. We applaud the political courage and statesmanship shown by both Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas. That is a unique opportunity for a breakthrough in the peace process, which could lead to a viable two-State solution and enable Israel and Palestine to live side-by-side in peace and security. It is crucial, therefore, that both parties — Israel and Palestine — refrain from any unilateral actions that could undermine the negotiations. In that context, new settlement announcements by Israel could potentially be very damaging and could derail the process. Rocket attacks from Gaza to Israel and the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza are both a great concern and do they not contribute to the peace process. We underline the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative in achieving peace in the Middle East. All the relevant parties should do everything possible to ensure that those negotiations succeed. Together with our European Union partners, we look forward to working with everyone to achieve a lasting success.

Mr. Errázuriz (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would to congratulate and thank you, Mr. President, for presiding over this open debate. I also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

Two decades after the signing of the Oslo Accords between the State of Israel and the then Palestine Liberation Organization, the transitional provisions have given way to a status quo that unfortunately continues to this day. Thus, after 20 years of progress and setbacks in the negotiations, there is still no sign of the desired two-State solution reflecting the principles established in the pertinent United Nations resolutions to allow the creation of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security with the State of Israel, within secure and internally recognized borders. The peoples of Israel and Palestine and their future generations deserve no less.

Chile recognized the State of Palestine in 2011. In that same year, it supported Palestine's full membership in UNESCO. Subsequently, in 2012, we were a sponsor of General Assembly resolution 67/19, which accorded Palestine the status of a non-member Observer State at the United Nations. We view that policy as a contribution to the peace, as it strengthens the capacities of the Palestinian State.

Owing to the foregoing, Chile welcomes the fact that the parties resumed direct negotiations under United States auspices last August. In particular, we welcome the personal commitment shown by Secretary of State John Kerry, who has visited the region on numerous occasions. In order for the negotiations to move forward, the parties must strengthen dialogue and build trust. That requires ongoing actions and the avoidance of unilateral acts that undermine or destroy confidence. The release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners is pointless if, at the same time, Israel announces the construction of thousands of homes in the settlements located in Palestinian territory, in contravention of international law.

It is also necessary to more strongly condemn the attacks affecting the civilian population of Israel, and measures must be taken to avoid provocative acts and incitement. I take this opportunity to reiterate my country's condemnation of all terrorist acts, in whatever form and whatever their motivation. Terrorism has no place in the world.

Chile supports the Palestinian reconciliation process between Fatah and Hamas, agreed in Doha and Cairo in 2012. We believe that the Islamic Resistance Movement must renounce the use of arms and recognize Israel's right to exist. Chile will continue to encourage the constructive, consistent commitment of Palestine and Israel to the current peace negotiations aimed at achieving a just and lasting peace in accordance with international law. It is our hope that that will be possible.

The conflict in Syria is of particular concern, as it has caused over 100,000 deaths. Regrettably, in nearly three years, the Council has been unable to adopt a resolution that, it was hoped, would end the tragedy. Nevertheless, the adoption of resolution 2118 (2013)

marked a turning point. Thanks to the joint work of the Council and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, progress has been made towards destroying the Syrian chemical arsenal through an unprecedented effort of the international community. However, it should be recalled that that is only one aspect of the conflict, in which conventional weapons have caused the most victims. Our country therefore reiterates that the provision of military supplies to any of the parties must halt in order to avoid exacerbating the conflict and the suffering of the civilian population.

The humanitarian crisis requires the Security Council to make every possible effort to call on the parties to the conflict to fulfil their obligations in relation to international humanitarian and human rights law, while guaranteeing the protection of civilians and the rapid and unimpeded access of humanitarian personnel. We call for the urgent implementation of the Security Council's presidential statement S/PRST/2013/15 of 2 October 2013. The International Humanitarian Pledging Conference, held in Kuwait, which dealt with humanitarian and refugee assistance, represents a step in the right direction.

Chile supports the efforts made by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi towards the convening of the second Geneva Conference on Syria and hopes that that meeting will generate momentum for a political agreement. The participation of all international actors in a position to influence the parties is necessary in order to ensure a political agreement. For their part, the parties must agree not to undermine the principles of the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 (S/2012/523, annex), whether or not they participated in that meeting. It is our hope that the parties will implement humanitarian measures to address the critical situation and efforts towards the building of mutual confidence in order to achieve the necessary political agreement. We reiterate the importance of women being represented at every level in the debates on the Syrian Arab Republic in order to ensure that their concerns are be duly considered and acted upon.

The deterioration of the security situation in Lebanon is reflected — inter alia — in the clashes between pro-Al-Assad and anti-Al-Assad demonstrators in Tripoli, the attack on the Iranian embassy, the assassination of former Minister Mohamad Chatah and the recent bombing in the southern Beirut suburb of Haret Hreik and the town of Hermel. Chile appeals to the Lebanese political leaders to promote the agreements needed to ensure the country's institutional functionality. In addition, it is important to encourage Lebanese society to implement the dissociation policy established in the Baabda Declaration.

We believe that it is the will of the international community to support Lebanon by promoting stability, sovereignty and territorial integrity, especially now that the Special Tribunal created to try the suspects in the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri has started its hearings, which form a crucial element of the task of combating impunity.

Chile maintains far-reaching ties with communities in the Middle East and stands ready to join with the international community in mapping out the road to peace and progress for the inhabitants of the region.

I conclude by thanking all of those that have welcomed my country upon its election as a non-permanent member of the Council.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are pleased to welcome you today, Mr. Minister, as President of the Security Council. We also congratulate Jordan on its assumption of the presidency of the Council.

The General Assembly has designated the year 2014 the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The Russian Federation shares the Secretary-General's belief that the year represents an important stage in achieving the two-State solution and stands ready to make every effort to ensure that it becomes a reality. However, as in any quarrel, the resolution of this out-dated dispute must be worked out by the conflicting parties. We are carefully following the Palestinian-Israeli settlement process, including attempts — first and foremost by the United States of America — to bring the parties towards an agreed framework to define the future principles of the final status solution.

Russia is in favour of a comprehensive, equitable, long-term settlement to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, based on the well-known international framework of the establishment of an integral, independent Palestinian State within internationally recognized borders, existing in peace and security with all of its neighbours. Naturally, any solution must be acceptable to both sides; imposed or inequitable solutions will not last long. We continue to actively participate in

negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis on a bilateral or multilateral basis and, especially, within the framework of the international mediators of the Middle East Quartet.

In that context, we note the scaling-up of efforts at the level of Special Representative, in which context the most recent meeting took place in Paris on 12 January. We believe that that meeting was most useful. It is our continuing belief that the Quartet's efforts should also draw upon the work of the League of Arab States. In our contacts with Palestinians and Israelis, we continue to urge both sides towards substantive negotiations on all final status issues. In two days, my country will welcome the President of Palestine, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, to Moscow.

We are extremely concerned regarding the situation on the ground. Settlement construction continues, effectively annulling even small good-will gestures, such as the freeing of Palestinian detainees who had been in Israeli prisons since the signing of the Oslo accords. We are also concerned about continuing raids by the Israeli military in the West Bank, which have resulted in the killing and wounding of many Palestinians, as well as rampant settler violence.

According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the number of Palestinians evicted from homes that were demolished by Israel in 2013 totalled 1,100, representing a 25 per cent increase over the previous year. We also adamantly condemn the launching of rockets against Israeli territory, whatever justification might be presented. Security breaches along the Gaza Strip must cease. All of these aggravating incidents are far from conducive to the holding of negotiations.

The situation in the Gaza Strip is not improving; on the contrary, the isolation of Gaza from the rest of the world is growing, which only exacerbates the negative social, economic and humanitarian consequences. The problem of Gaza should be resolved comprehensively, including through the full lifting of the Israeli blockade and the restoration of a united administration in the Palestinian territories. We remain convinced that bridging the existing Palestinian split on the basis of the Palestinian Authority's platform and the Arab Peace Initiative would be in line with the aspirations for peace for Israel and Palestine. Achieving a comprehensive Palestinian-Israeli solution — and, even less likely, consolidating its results — will clearly be impossible without Palestinian unity.

We attach great significance to the launching of talks between the Government of Syria and the opposition, with the constructive assistance of the international community. We support the Secretary-General's responsible and principled approach in issuing an invitation to participate in those efforts to all those who could directly have an influence on the situation in Syria, including Iran. Not ensuring the participation of such key players would be an unforgivable error. Those who would call into question that need are clearly not interested in an equitable resolution of the Syrian crisis. We call upon the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, which has decided to attend the Conference, and invite it to cease the practice of imposing preconditions. We find it unfortunate that the opposition delegation does not include the participation of patriotic groups of internal opponents, such as the National Coordination Committee and a number of leading Kurdish groups, which constitutes an attack on the credibility and the representative nature of the opposition.

We would nevertheless like to note the intention and full readiness of the Syrian Government to send to Switzerland a representative and a fully mandated delegation. We also note other measures taken by Damascus, such as its response to the Russian appeal concerning the humanitarian situation. That pertains to the delivery of humanitarian goods in residential areas in Guta and other areas, including Damascus and Aleppo. In that regard, we have seen a willingness to exchange civilians taken hostage by fighters in exchange for prisoners in Government prisons. The practical implementation of those measures requires cooperation by the armed opposition in ensuring safe access for humanitarian goods. We hope that the Government, which has stood ready to do that, will be met with similar steps by the opposition. We expect that the pledges made in Kuwait will be honoured soon. It is important that the United Nations streamline the contributions and distribute the various types of assistance that have been offered.

We continue to work tirelessly to bolster inter-Syrian dialogue to finally put an end to the bloodshed, to stop making Syria into a hotbed of international and regional terrorism, to ensure conditions for peace and calm, and to ensure that the country retains its sovereign territorial integrity and as a secular and an independent State where all rights of ethnic and interreligious groups are ensured.

Mr. Araud (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the representative of the State of Israel and the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine for their statements.

I shall touch on several points — the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and the situation in Syria — before saying a few words about Lebanon.

In the Middle East, everything must be done to ensure that the efforts of the United States Secretary of State are crowned with success. France lends its full support to the efforts of the United States, particularly those of the Secretary of State, to drive forward the negotiations that are under way. The parametres for a solution are well known and have been set forth in several Security Council resolutions. The eventual acceptance by the parties of an initiative by the United States on a framework for the negotiations, broadly outlining a resolution to the conflict, could constitute significant progress towards a definitive peace agreement. Twenty years after Oslo, any interim formula must be discarded.

In order to ensure progress in the current efforts, the parties must refrain from any gesture likely to undermine the process, particularly as far as settlements are concerned. Along with its European partners, France has condemned the publication of a call for proposals by the Israeli authorities, on 10 January, to build more than 1,800 homes in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, following the approval given on 5 January to build new homes in the settlements of Ofra and Karnei Shomron in the West Bank. The French President called on the Israeli authorities to totally and finally halt the settlements when he visited Israel and Palestine from 17 to 19 November 2013.

In its conclusions of 16 December, the European Union presented the details of the unprecedented special privilege partnerships that would be offered to the parties in the event of a definitive agreement, which is of course the goal of the current efforts. That partnership would cover economic, political, security and social aspects, thereby allowing for stronger cooperation between the European Union an the two States, bolstering and helping with the construction of the Palestinian State and promoting trade and economic and human development in the region.

On Syria, gGiven the suffering of the people and the destruction of the country, fatalism must not prevail. We hope that this week will prove a decisive one. The second Geneva Conference on Syria will begin in Montreux on Wednesday, 22 January. France and its international partners have done everything in their power to assist the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces to prepare for that important Conference. We should welcome the decision taken this weekend in Istanbul by the Syrian opposition to participate in the Conference under the aegis of the National Coalition.

That decision was not an automatic one. The ongoing brutal repression, especially in Aleppo; the fact that civilians are caught in the fighting; the lack of humanitarian access to areas under the control of the opposition, in which Yarmouk is one of the most tragic examples; and, finally, the provocative statements about maintaining President Bashar Al-Assad in power at all costs in the midst of presidential elections, which no reasonable person would recognize as legitimate; and the outrageous reply from Mr. Mouallem to the Secretary-General's invitation to the Conference — everything has been done by the regime to deter the opposition from participating in that exercise.

The Secretary-General's invitation to the second Geneva Conference on Syria was unambiguous. The goal of the Conference is the full implementation of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex), namely, the establishement of a transitional Government with full executive powers, including, of course, over the armed forces and the security services. We are in agreement in acknowledging that this document is a reference point for a political solution in Syria. The attempts by the regime to impose its interpretation on the second Geneva Conference on Syria will not fool anyone.

When it comes to Iran, it must be clear to everyone that any participation in the second Geneva Conference on Syria is conditional to the explicit acceptance of the mandate laid down in the invitation letter to the Conference from the Secretary-General, to which I have just referred. One cannot claim to support a political process out of the crisis in good faith while rejecting the goal and the parametres. In that connection, the questions raised by the Syrian National Coalition are legitimate and should be answered.

Although this is obvious, I would also remind the Council that those with blood on their hands — those who bear responsibility for the crimes committed in the course of more than two years — must not play a part in the political transition. We wish to see those matters brought before the International Criminal Court.

Against that backdrop, we must also send a message of support to Lebanon. We support the determination of the Lebanese authorities to protect themselves from the political repercussion of the Syrian crisis, in line with the Baabda Declaration of June 2012, as they combat all forms of terrorism and commit to combating impunity. The opening of the trial at the Special Tribunal for Lebanon marks a decisive stage in combating impunity for terrorist acts.

Lebanon urgently needs a Government capable of taking decisions, given a political, economic and social situation increasingly fraught with difficulties. It must also be able to count on functioning institutions that can help with the influx of almost 1 million refugees from Syria. We must continue to mobilize to support that country, particularly within the context of the International Support Group for Lebanon.

Mrs. Ogwu (Nigeria): I would like to warmly welcome you, Mr. President, and to congratulate you on Jordan's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January. I wish also to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing, which has provided us with a wealth of insights into the current situation in the Middle East.

Our intervention will focus on three aspects: peace between Israel and Palestine; Syria; and Lebanon. We believe, first, that the immediate attainment of peace between Israel and Palestine is central to the normalization of the situation in the Middle East and also of vital importance to global peace and security.

I take this opportunity to reiterate Nigeria's support for a two-State solution that would allow Israel and Palestine to live together side by side in peace and security. Peace between Israel and Palestine, we believe, will not only have a beneficial impact on both countries, but also constitute the key to peace in the Middle East as a region.

On 29 July 2013, direct final-status talks between Israel and Palestine resumed after a long hiatus. We commend the efforts of the United States Government and Secretary of State John Kerry's personal commitment in restarting the talks. The international community can lend momentum to this effort by supporting the current peace process.

We note that a period of nine months was decided upon within which a comprehensive settlement of all outstanding issues would be reached. We are now in the sixth month, and we urge all parties to make greater strides in their efforts towards the attainment of peace.

The United State-brokered peace talks are now at a critical stage. The recent announcement of the Israeli Government's plan to build 1,400 housing units in Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank may not be helpful to the peace process. We urge Israel to reconsider this plan, which is capable of derailing the peace talks.

Nigeria is not unmindful of the need to guarantee Israel's security and continued existence as a sovereign State. It is for this reason that we support the comprehensive discussion of all final-status issues so as to leave no room for continuation of the conflict, which has lasted far too long for any side's comfort or interest. We encourage both sides to carefully examine the United States plan for security arrangements, with a view to moving forward towards the adoption of an accord that would address those proposals.

We also note that the members of the Quartet met at the highest level on 27 September 2013 and reaffirmed their determination to lend effective support to both parties. We wish to stress, however, that efforts to strengthen the Palestinian economy and build Palestinian institutions should be seen as supportive of the peace process and not necessarily as supplanting it. We believe that priority must be given to the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State.

We note and welcome the meeting held in Amman between King Abdullah II and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu last Thursday, 16 January, to discuss the peace process and seek ways to move it forward. We encourage such exchanges as confidence-building measures and transparent attempts in the search for lasting peace in the Middle East.

Concerning Syria, while we welcome the progress recorded in the elimination of the country's chemical weapons under the supervision of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons/United Nations joint mission, we urge the world not to lose sight of the ongoing civil war in the country, which has claimed over 100,000 lives and displaced millions of people, both internally and across Syria's borders. The humanitarian dimension of the Syrian crisis remains a matter of great concern to Nigeria, especially considering the fact that millions of children are reported to be among the victims.

The gender dimension of the crisis is also of concern to us. We are deeply disturbed by reports of women being increasingly targeted for assault and violence, particularly in refugee camps, where they are supposed to feel safe and, indeed, protected. We deplore and condemn such acts of violence against women and would like to see the perpetrators brought to justice. The hardship and indignities that Syrian women face in the refugee camps deeply diminish our humanity, and we call on all sides in the conflict to ensure, at all times, the safety and dignity of women embroiled in the crisis.

Today the need for the return of peace to Syria is more urgent than ever. It is our hope that the second Geneva Conference on Syria, scheduled for this week, will create the conditions necessary to attain that much-desired objective. We encourage all parties to the conflict to participate in the Conference without preconditions. We reaffirm our stance that there can be no military solution to the Syrian crisis. Only a political solution attained through a transparent and inclusive process can lead to peace in Syria. Nigeria's desire is to see, in the very near future, a peaceful, prosperous, united and democratic Syria taking its rightful place in the world.

Turning to Lebanon, we are unequivocal in our condemnation of the recent spate of terrorist attacks, which left several Lebanese citizens dead and dozens injured. Such attacks threaten the peace and stability of the country and add another dimension to an already difficult security situation. President Sleiman has stated that immunizing Lebanon against such attacks will require solidarity between the leaders and the people. We urge the people of Lebanon to unite and stand firm with their leaders against any attempt to inject despair and disunity into the body politic. Attacking innocent and defenceless people will not in any way address the political differences of the parties or, indeed, advance the unity and progress of Lebanon. Only honest dialogue and recourse to peaceful means can prove beneficial and long-lasting in the attainment of any political agenda.

Sir Mark Lyall Grant (United Kingdom): Mr. President, I welcome your Foreign Minister's presence in the Security Council today, and I should like also to thank the Secretary-General for his statement and the representatives of Palestine and Israel for their contributions to this debate.

As we enter 2014, we are at a moment of opportunity for the Middle East peace process. Entering back into direct negotiations last year was a bold step forward. It was a welcome move towards peace in a troubled area. It is the responsibility of all of us here to support the parties, led by the United States, to capitalize on this opportunity.

My Government continues to put its full support behind Secretary Kerry and his team, and we urge the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships to continue their admirable focus and commitment.

This year started on a positive note, with the implementation of Israel's brave decision to release the third tranche of Palestinian prisoners. The United Kingdom firmly believes that such steps, despite their difficulty, are important to achieving a lasting peace and security.

However, we are very concerned by Israel's decision to announce further settlement-building in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. My Government condemns these announcements and considers such actions as a serious threat to peace. We urge Israel to avoid any further illegal settlement activity and to reverse the advancement of plans. The United Kingdom has also been clear that for this process to be a success, the people on the ground, both Israelis and Palestinians, need to see the real and tangible benefits of peace. We therefore remain deeply concerned about the 663 Palestinian-owned homes and livelihood structures demolished in Area C and East Jerusalem in 2013. Demolitions and evictions are harmful to the peace process and in all but the most limited circumstances are contrary to international humanitarian law.

Reports of price tag attacks, including on a mosque in Deir Istiya village on 15 January, are also of serious concern. We condemn such acts and urge the Israeli authorities to bring those responsible to justice. We are also concerned about rocket fire from the Gaza Strip into Israel and, in particular, condemn the rockets fired at Ashkelon on 16 January in violation of international law. All parties must respect the 12 November ceasefire agreement in full. The people of Gaza and Israel will only lose from further violence.

There will be difficult decisions in the months ahead, but we urge all those involved to keep their shared goal in mind — a negotiated two-State solution leading to a sovereign, viable and contiguous Palestinian State living in peace and security alongside a safe and secure Israel. The United Kingdom stands ready to do its part. That is why we strongly back the European

Union's readiness to offer an unprecedented package of political, economic and security support to both parties in the event that a final status deal is reached.

On Syria, the Secretary-General has made clear that the aim of this week's second Geneva Conference on Syria is to assist the Syrian parties in ending the violence and achieving a comprehensive agreement for a political settlement, implementing fully the Geneva communiqué (S/2013/523, annex), while preserving the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria. As the permanent members of the Council agreed on 30 June 2012, and as was endorsed by the full Security Council in resolution 2118 (2013) last September, that means agreeing to the establishment of a transitional governing body in Syria with full executive powers formed by mutual consent to meet the aspirations of the Syrian people.

Yesterday, the Secretary-General announced that he was extending an invitation to Iran to attend the opening of the Conference at Montreux on the basis that it acknowledges that the Conference's purpose is the full implementation of the original Geneva communiqué. If the Iranians are to attend, it is now vital that their Government confirm publicly and clearly that they share that understanding. We have also urged the United Nations, as mandated by the Security Council in many resolutions, including resolution 2122 (2013) of October 2013, to ensure a full role for women in the Syrian peace negotiations.

It is important to remember that those negotiations will be a process, not a single event. We should not underestimate the formidable challenges ahead, and we must not lose sight of the desperate situation that Syrian civilians are facing on a daily basis. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights now puts the death toll at over 125,000 people. In Aleppo and across all of Syria, we have seen the regime continue to attack its own civilian population with barrel bombs. That indiscriminate bombardment is yet another war crime on the part of the regime, and Al-Assad and those around him should have no doubt that the world will hold them to account. The situation in Syria should be referred to the International Criminal Court.

The humanitarian crisis has reached catastrophic proportions. Eleven million Syrians are in desperate need of urgent assistance, particularly in besieged and hard to reach areas. It is an unparalleled crisis, and the world needs to respond accordingly.

We welcome the $2.4 billion of pledges made at the Kuwait pledging conference last week. My Government announced a further pledge of $163 million in humanitarian assistance, bringing our total contribution to nearly $1 billion — the largest sum that the United Kingdom has ever committed to a single crisis. The funding is going towards meeting the basic life-saving needs of Syrians affected by the conflict, both inside Syria and in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq. We pay tribute to those neighbouring countries, including Jordan, for the burden they are carrying to help alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people.

But increased funding can make a difference only if there is progress on access and protection for humanitarian actors in Syria, where 21 United Nations staff members remain in Government detention and 47 humanitarian workers have now been killed. Progress on implementing the Council's presidential statement of 2 October 2013 (S/PRST/2013/15) remains extremely limited. It is unacceptable that humanitarian organizations are being deliberately obstructed by the regime from delivering aid. The regime has shown that it can facilitate access for chemical weapons inspectors; it needs to show the same commitment to ensuring aid reaches those most in need.

Mr. Cherif (Chad) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, we warmly welcome you to the Security Council and congratulate you on your country's assumption of the presidency of the Council.

I would like first of all to commend the Council for its initiative to include the situation in the Middle East on its agenda and for the constant interest it has shown in that question. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and the representative of Israel and observer of the State of Palestine for their statements. I would also like to welcome all delegations that have joined the list to speak in the Council today.

When talking about the situation in the Middle East, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict comes first to mind despite the seriousness of the Syrian crisis and its impact on its neighbouring countries such as Lebanon. Regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict — which, given its enduring nature, complexity and regional implications, remains a major concern of the international community — we, like many others, believe that in the absence of a final, just and equitable solution that will guarantee security for Israel and an independent and viable State for the Palestinians,

it would be difficult to claim that an effective and lasting peace has been achieved in the Middle East. In that regard, legal frameworks and possible potential solutions to conflicts having disastrous consequences that have lasted for far too long are already contained in the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Quartet road map, the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 and existing agreements between the two parties.

Therefore, Palestinians and Israelis must make greater efforts to continue negotiations to reach a comprehensive resolution of all issues inherent in final status that will put an end to the occupation and conflict. These include the issues of territory, security, the status of Jerusalem, refugees, settlements and water, all of which should be based on the principle of two States living side by side, where each party recognizes the legitimate right of the other to live in peace and security. In our humble opinion, only a negotiated, just and lasting settlement is likely to enable the Palestinian people to regain their basic rights and the Israeli people to live in peace and security within the borders of 1967.

The option for peace is naturally incompatible with the continued colonization of the occupied territories, the continued blockade of Gaza, air strikes on civilians and rocket attacks against innocent Israeli citizens. Those actions not only undermine the peace process but also undermine the efforts of the international community, which is working towards the two-State solution.

For us, it is clear that the time has come to recognize a State of Palestine alongside the State of Israel. We must have the courage to take that step as it is essential to advancing peace between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. In that regard, we welcome the General Assembly decision in resolution 67/19 to grant to Palestine non-member observer State status in the Organization and UNESCO's decision to admit Palestine as a member. In any event, we welcome and encourage the efforts of the international community in general, and of the United States of America, in particular, to revive direct negotiations between the two parties to the conflict. Those efforts, however laudable, are insufficient in and of themselves; both parties must still demonstrate a genuine political will to overcome the current impasse so that a new impetus can be given to negotiations.

We therefore urgently call on the entire international community, including the United Nations, the European Union, the League of Arab States, as well as States with influence on both parties, to further encourage the State of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to take steps to build mutual trust in order to resume direct negotiations.

We are deeply troubled by the situation in Syria. It calls on us all to act because the current situation is particularly serious. We do not have the right to let an entire population fall to its demise. The use of chemical weapons, which speaks to a dramatic escalation of the civil war in that country, is an affront to the human conscience and the ideals that led to the founding of our Organization. While we welcome the process to destroy Syrian chemical weapons launched following the agreement between the United States and Russia, my country would like to see those who have used those weapons identified and brought before an international tribunal.

Moreover, we are horrified to see Syria deteriorate to this point and to see Syrians kill each other with such violence. The international community must spare no effort in stopping that tragedy. The alleged serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, the bombing of civilians and summary executions must be categorically condemned and the perpetrators — whoever they may be — must be prosecuted. We also express our dismay at the atrocities committed by terrorist groups linked to Al-Qaida and the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant, which are exacerbating the situation with their fierce fighting, leading to hundreds of deaths, not to mention the abuses of which they are guilty.

Given that chaos, we hope that the second Geneva Conference on Syria, scheduled to begin on 22 January, will provide an appropriate solution to the Syrian crisis by bringing together all segments of Syrian society and meeting the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. Chad hopes that the Syrian National Coalition does not backpedal on its courageous decision to take part in the Conference.

We strongly hope that the Conference can stop the cycle of violence and provide a lasting solution to the Syrian crisis. If the negotiations at the second Geneva Conference lead to a solution to the crisis, which we dearly hope for, the international community must immediately start thinking about support measures for Syria in its reconstruction and peacebuilding efforts.

Finally, I want to talk about the situation in Lebanon, which has borne the brunt of the consequences of the Syrian crisis. Recently, Lebanon has become a stage for car bombings and other deadly terrorist attacks, which we firmly condemn. In that regard, allow me to welcome the opening last Thursday in The Hague, before the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, of the trial in absentia of the alleged assassins of former Prime Minister of Lebanon Rafik Hariri and 21 other individuals.

The cycle of attacks and reprisals committed since the past summer in Lebanon could exacerbate intercommunal tensions and threaten the already fragile national unity. Besides the violence, the presence in Lebanon of more than 1 million Syrian refugees is also a source of tension, which could further complicate the situation. Given the risk of the destabilization of Lebanon, the international community must pay greater attention to the situation of that country in order to help it better withstand the consequences of the Syrian crisis and preserve its unity, cohesion and stability.

Mr. Nibishaka (Rwanda): Allow me to express my gratitude to Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestian question, as well as on the peace prospects in the region.

Rwanda wishes to express its appreciation to all stakeholders involved in the Middle East peace process, particularly the United States Government through Secretary of State John Kerry. We commend his tireless efforts in bringing both sides to direct negotiations, and we hope that the parties will seize this opportunity to chart the way forward towards a just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestian conflict. The current negotiations are at a critical moment that requires both sides to demonstrate not only trust, decency and sincerity, but also readiness to sacrifice some of their important positions so as to reach a genuine peace agreement.

Rwanda is confident that the two parties can reach a two-State solution for both peoples, with a viable independent State of Palestine living side by side in peace with a secure Israel. In order to reach that agreement, there must an intentional show of good will and confidence-building between Israel and the Palestinian people, such as refraining from cross-border attacks and from all provocations, including negative media propaganda and all forms of incitement to violence that would jeopardize the ongoing negotiations.

In that regard, we commend the Israeli Government for continuing to honour its commitment by releasing the third batch of 26 Palestinian prisoners, and we welcome the recent measure undertaken by the Palestinian Authority and facilitated by the Government of Israel to respond to the direct impact of the recent storm, which included permitting the delivery of water pumps, humanitarian assistance and 1.2 millions litres of industrial fuel to the Gaza power plant, as part of the Qatari donation. However, my delegation strongly condemns the continued rocket attacks into southern Israel from Gaza, which remain a significant concern of ongoing negotiations. We call on all parties concerned in Gaza to participate in the peace process, which is the only viable channel to the stability of the region. Acts of that kind threaten to worsen the already fragile situation on the ground and could derail the ongoing negotiations.

With regard to the Syrian conflict, Rwanda is extremely concerned by the deteriorating situation in that country, which makes it more urgent to put an end to the violence and to the suffering of the Syrian people, and to find a political solution. We still believe that there is no military solution to the Syrian conflict and the cost of war is too high to endure. The crisis has already claimed more than 100,000 innocent lives, with over 9 million in urgent humanitarian need. We urge all parties to respond positively to the opportunity to find a political solution through the second Geneva Conference on Syria and to cease hostilities. It is also important that the concerned States, particularly the permanent members of this body dedicated to peace and security, stop supplying weapons to conflicting parties that are responsible for gross violations of human rights.

In that connection, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to the United States and the Russian Federation, as well as to the United Nations through the Joint Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for their efforts in bringing all parties together to resolve the crisis in Syria. In that context, Rwanda is concerned about the thousands of innocent civilians, including women, children and the elderly, who have been trapped or besieged in contested areas and cut off from aid for a month now due to continued fighting between the Government and the rebel forces.

We welcome the high-level pledging conference for Syria that took place on 15 January in Kuwait, and we thank the donor community for its strong commitment.

We urge all those who pledged to honour their pledges in time to serve the critical conditions of the Syrians. We also call on all parties in Syria to take all appropriate measures to facilitate safe and unhindered access to populations in need of assistance, as put forward by the presidential statement of 2 October 2013 (S/PRST/2013/15). It is important that the parties to the conflict observe local ceasefires in order to help humanitarian assistance to reach the needy, and that they respect all their obligations under international law.

With regard to Lebanon, we welcome the opening of the trial by the Special Tribunal for Lebanon of four suspects nearly nine years after the heinous attacks that killed former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and 21 other people. Nevertheless, the overall situation in Lebanon seems to be deteriorating. Rwanda strongly condemns the recent series of violent attacks in Beirut and in the northern city of Tripoli, as well as the shelling in the Bekaa Valley that resulted in several deaths and injuries. Of equal concern is the continued sectarian tension in Lebanon, which is identified as part of the spill-over from the Syrian conflict. We reiterate that the only path to ending these sectarian tensions and violence in Lebanon will entirely depend on a positive outcome of the second Geneva Conference on Syria, which is expected to end the Syrian conflict.

My delegation continues to urge the Lebanese Government to remain steadfast to the Baabda Declaration, setting out a policy of disassociation with regard to the conflict in Syria. We further encourage all parties in Lebanon to show commitment and compromise in forming a new Lebanese Government, which will facilitate the ending of tensions.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China welcomes the presence of Mr. Nasser Judeh, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Jordan, to preside over today's open debate. I thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing. China also listened carefully to the statements made by the representatives of Israel and Palestine.

The question of Palestine has always been a core issue of the situation in the Middle East. It has remained unresolved for a long time, which has not only brought severe suffering to the Palestinian people but also made it impossible to achieve peace between Palestine and Israel, much less peace and stability in the Middle East. Establishing an independent State of Palestine and the peaceful coexistence of Palestine and Israel are the only way forward and also an important guarantee for achieving long-term peace and stability in the Middle East.

China has always maintained that the parties concerned should adhere to the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the road map for peace in the Middle East, and, on this basis and through political negotiations, establish an independent State of Palestine, with full sovereignty based on the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

China supports the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli peace talks, which are at a critical juncture. If they do not forge ahead, they will suffer a setback. Palestine and Israel should recognize each other's right to exist and accommodate the other's reasonable concerns. This is indispensable for the progress of any negotiations. We sincerely hope that Palestine and Israel will seize this opportunity, seek common ground and demonstrate good will so as to promptly find a definitive solution and promote early substantive progress in the peace talks.

China is opposed to Israeli settlement activities in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and other occupied Palestinian territories. In the current circumstances, an end to settlement activities and violence against innocent civilians, as well as the full lifting of the blockade against the Gaza Strip, are of critical importance to maintaining an environment conducive to the peace talks.

The General Assembly has designated 2014 the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. With the ongoing turbulence in the Middle East, the international community should proceed on the basis of the overall goal of maintaining peace and stability in the Middle East, strengthen the sense of urgency in seeking a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli question, and enhance efforts to encourage the relevant parties to achieve peace through talks. China hopes that the Quartet will take concrete measures in that regard. We support the Security Council in playing a greater role in finding a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli question.

China has always attached great importance to the question of the Middle East and is committed to promoting the peace process. In May 2013, for the first time ever, China received simultaneous visits from

Palestinian and Israeli leaders. President Xi Jinping put forward a four-point proposal for a solution to the Palestinian question, fully demonstrating the Chinese Government's sincerity and positive attitude in promoting peace in the Middle East. In December 2013, Chinese Minister for Foreign Affairs Wang Yi visited Palestine and Israel and further encouraged both parties to achieve peace through talks. China will continue to follow the four-point proposal put forward by President Xi Jinping, work hard to promote peace talks between Palestinians and Israelis, and play a greater role so as to make it due contribution to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

China has closely followed the situation in Syria. Developments over the past three years have fully demonstrated that military means will not settle the question of Syria. Political settlement through dialogue and negotiation is the only correct choice and is also the object of international consensus. It is also, more importantly, the direction that all the parties must follow in the future.

We welcome and support the second Geneva Conference on Syria, to be held on 22 January in Switzerland. Yesterday, Chinese Minister for Foreign Affairs Wang Yi put forward a five-point proposal for a political solution to the question of Syria. First, the Syrian issue must be resolved through political means. Secondly, the future of Syria must be decided by its own people. Thirdly, an inclusive political transition process must be promoted. Fourthly, national reconciliation and unity must be achieved in Syria. Fifthly, humanitarian assistance must be delivered in Syria and its neighbouring countries.

The second Geneva Conference on Syria will mark the beginning of dialogue and negotiations, which should be an ongoing process. We hope that all the parties in Syria will work with the future of the nation and the overall interests of the entire Syrian people in mind, demonstrate political will, seize the opportunity, come to the negotiating table and seek common ground so as to find a solution that meets national needs and takes into consideration the interests of all of the parties.

The international community should firmly uphold the Charter of the United Nations and the basic norms guiding international relations; commit itself to maintaining the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria; respect the will and choice of the Syrian people; adopt a just, balanced and impartial attitude; play a constructive role in promoting peace talks; create favourable conditions for the political transition; and support the efforts of the Secretary-General and Mr. Brahimi, Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria, so as to maintain and fully leverage the United Nations leading role in good offices and mediation.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): There are a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. I intend, with the concurrence of the members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.20 p.m.